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The Boy Captain; OR, THE PIRATE'S DAUGHTER.

BY ROGER STARBUCK.

CHAPTER I. THE STORM.

DARK, sulphurous-looking clouds obscured the sun; the sea bore the same dismal hue.

In the distance was heard a hollow, unearthly moaning—the warning voice of the coming storm.

"We will never get back to land—we are lost!"

Thus spoke one of a party of thirty youths, ranging from seventeen to nineteen years of age; the crew of the yacht "Swan," aboard which, with an old seaman named Ben Bolt to assist them, they had sailed from Perth, Australia, where they resided, intending to return before night.

Having made a run of fifty miles, they had veered (come round), to retrace their course. But soon, with appalling suddenness, a calm had fallen on the sea, and the signs of the terrific tempest now visible, made even old Ben Bolt shrug his square shoulders.

He had at once directed all sail taken in, ready for scudding under bare poles, and had battened down the single hatch, amidships, and secured the doors of the cabin, that the seas might not enter.

Thus prepared, as well as she could be, for the tempest, the frail yacht, a beautiful little vessel, with a clipper hull, painted a creamy-white, relieved by one red stripe on each side, lay gently swaying under the lowering sky.

The boy who spoke had addressed himself to Will Sinclair, a tall, fine-looking youth of eighteen, with bronzed cheeks, clear, blue eyes, beaming with fire and spirit, light chestnut-colored hair, and a frank countenance. Like his companions, he wore a blue shirt,

with a broad, open collar, a loose, black necktie, and sailor pants of white duck, which well became his supple, active form. While his young shipmates were all more or less excited, he exhibited a degree of resolution and composure, that betokened not only a firm spirit, but also some familiarity with the perils of the sea.

In fact, from a very early age, Sinclair had habituated himself to boating, yachting, and fishing. His uncle, Mr. Sandal, with whom he had resided, since the death of his parents, twelve years previous to the present time, was a man of cold, selfish nature, caring little for his nephew. This indifference developed in the lad that spirit of manly self-reliance and courage, in moments of peril, which had induced his boy-friends to select him for their captain,

when, with their united funds, they purchased their beautiful vessel.

"I hope," said Mr. Sandal to the youth, just before he sailed, "that you will see the merchant ship Texel."

"I hope so," Sinclair had answered, knowing that this vessel, which was to bring his uncle a treasure from the Indies, was expected soon to arrive.

The treasure consisted of a chest full of gold and silver images, such as crosses, figures of the Virgin Mary, of Christ, the Apostle Paul, etc., which Mr. Sandal had learned from the Texel's captain, were held by a certain old Hindoo, who was willing to part with them for a quarter of their value, because, if any of the heathen priests should find them in his possession, he would be put to death.

"Don't be afraid," said Sinclair to the lad who had addressed him aboard the yacht, "but stand by to obey every order from Ben Bolt, and we will weather the storm."

The moaning in the distance became louder.

A long, broad line of white water, with driving columns of rack and scud, was seen to windward.

"We're going to have a pealer, my lads," he said, rolling his tobacco-cud from side to side of his grizzly cheeks.

"Ay, ay," answered Sinclair.

Then, springing amidships, with his clear gaze he scanned the face of every one present.

"Boys!" he exclaimed, in his ringing voice, "I hope you'll all give a good account of yourselves!"

"We will! we will! Hur-ray!" shouted the youthful party.

Shrieking, howling and roaring, the storm came at last. Down went the yacht on her beam-ends, shrouded in the rack, with the blinding spray flying all around her, and cataracts of water pouring over her weather rail.

For some minutes she was thus driven along, humming like a top; then, struck by a heavy, rolling sea, under the counter, over she went, scooping up the water with her lee rail, her tall mainmast almost parallel with the foaming surface of ocean.



THE BOY CAPTAIN'S PERIL.

It seemed as if she would never get up. There she was, her sharp keel far out of water, driving along with her bows buried, needing only the stroke of another sea to turn her bottom upward.

And *that* sea—a huge, roaring, liquid wall—now was rapidly approaching!

"HOLD HARD FOR YOUR LIVES!" shouted Ben, who was at the wheel, one leg thrown around the barrel to keep him in place.

Terrified, all the boys except Sinclair clung to the weather-rail. The young captain, gliding swiftly along on the weather side of the yacht, sprang to the wheel to assist the old sailor.

With their united efforts, the two succeeded in jamming the the helm "hard up."

"Now, if she answers, we're safe, my lad; if not, it's all over with the Swan!"

On came the sea, crashing and roaring like a live monster.

Sinclair and Ben watched it keenly, but as yet there was no sign of the yacht's answering her wheel.

Soon the huge wall of water was within a ship's length of the frail vessel. Another minute must decide her fate.

"There—she's swinging off, at last! ALL RIGHT!" suddenly exclaimed Sinclair.

His young shipmates clinging to the rail, uttered a cheer. But at that moment there was a report like thunder, as the mainsail, suddenly blowing clear of the gasket that held it, was lifted, slatting furiously, from the boom.

The pressure of the sail on the after part of the vessel held her, preventing her from swinging off, further!

Unless that sail were secured, the yacht would be lost!

Who could secure it in such a tempest? With the boom shaking and swinging over the mad vortex of roaring waters, it seemed as if no human being could hold himself to the spar!

But the most imminent perils had never yet deterred Sinclair from attempting the performance of necessary duties.

He darted at once from the wheel, sprang upon the boom, grasping two reef-points of the canvas, and, thrusting a leg between the bottom leach of the sail and the spar, he thus obtained a 'purchase' which enabled him to keep his place. Several times, however, after he had thrown himself upon the slatting canvas, thus keeping it down while he passed the gasket around it, he was nearly hurled overboard by the jerking of the boom.

In a few minutes, having secured the sail, Sinclair returned to the helm.

The yacht now swung off, righted and went scudding directly before the wind, taking the threatening sea under her stern and gallantly riding it out.

Meanwhile the gale was still raging fiercely. The roar of wind and ocean was terrific. On went the little vessel, scudding dead before the gale, further and further from land every moment, now and then burying herself to her waist, while the foaming, roaring waters poured over both rails.

"I say, boys," exclaimed one of the lads, "three cheers for our gallant captain."

"You may well cheer him, my youngsters," said Ben Bolt, "for he it is who has saved us all from going to Davy Jones'."

The boys gave three rousing cheers.

"Long live our gallant captain!" shouted one; and the words were caught up and echoed by the rest.

Sinclair bowed in acknowledgment; then, tossing his handsome head, to shake the spray from his chestnut locks, he said:

"It was nothing, after all. I'm used to that sort of thing!"

The storm continued to rage all the rest of the day, and throughout the night, with unabated fury.

Toward morning there was a lull.

"Where are we, now?" inquired one of the crew of Ben Bolt.

"We are about two hundred miles to the northwest of Perth," was the reply.

"Can we not get back by tacking?"

"We had better wait until the gale goes down some more," replied Ben Bolt; "but, first, let's get breakfast."

A plentiful supply of provisions had been stowed aboard the vessel by the young voyagers.

The table in the neat cabin was soon set, and the crew were enjoying their meal, when, suddenly, the clear voice of Sinclair, who had remained on deck at the helm, was heard:

"SAIL 'O!"

Ben Bolt snatching a spy glass near him, at once ran on deck, followed by all hands.

"Whereaway?" inquired the old tar of the young helmsman.

"There, about three miles off: three points abaft the weather beam!" was Sinclair's ready answer.

Bolt looked long and carefully at the stranger, while all the boys stood watching him, earnestly.

As the old tar gazed, he behaved in a singular manner, rolling his quid rapidly, straddling his legs, drawing them back again, and twisting one side of his wide mouth upward until it almost met the corner of his left eye!

At length he shut the glass with a loud click.

"Let's finish breakfast, my lads," said he. "Down into the cabin ye go!"

"But the stranger?" inquired one of the boys, "what is she?"

"What is she? Oh well, you see I can't make her out, very well. Away ye go to breakfast."

The boys descended into the cabin. Bolt seemed at first about to follow them; but, as the last one disappeared, he suddenly turned on his heel, and, with solemn face, advanced to Sinclair's side.

"I didn't want to 'spile' their breakfast for 'em," he said; "although they must know it, sooner or later."

"Know what?" asked Sinclair.

The old sailor laid his hand on the youth's shoulder.

"I'll tell ye, for I've seen plenty of them craft before. The stranger yonder is a Malay, and, what is worse yet—A PIRATE!"

CHAPTER II.

THE PIRATE.

"ARE you sure of what you say?" inquired Sinclair.

"As sure as my name's Ben Bolt."

"Is she in chase of us?"

"She's scudding, but you'll soon see her shoulder-o'-mutton sail out."

Sinclair's eyes flashed.

"If we had arms aboard," said he, "I'd not run from her. But there are nothing but a couple of revolvers in the cabin."

"True, my lad. All we can do is to show our heels, and make the best of it."

A few minutes later, the boys having finished breakfast, came on deck.

Then Sinclair, surrendering the wheel to one of them, delivered a brief address.

"Lads, the craft off our beam is a pirate. I hope every one of you will do his duty, and make sail as soon as possible."

The wind had now lulled, so that the mainsail and jib could be set.

Under this canvas, the Swan, heading as before, made good progress. Suddenly, however, the wind died away. Rising and falling on the long swells, lay the yacht, with her canvas rattling.

The Malay—a large proa—now was about three miles distant, the Swan having increased the distance between the two craft, and thus shown herself the swifter vessel.

But now the youthful crew exchanged anxious glances.

"While sailing, we were all right," whispered Ben to Sinclair; "but now, unless we soon have a breeze, it's all up with us."

"Ay, ay, Ben. What's that?"—looking toward the pirate.

"The rascal is lowering a boat. We'll soon have the cutthroats aboard!"

In fact, a long, sharp boat, manned with a crew, armed to the teeth, as Sinclair could

perceive through the glass, was approaching. Some of the boys turned pale, but all looked resolute—prepared for the worst.

On came the pirates, now near enough for their wild, ferocious yells to be faintly heard.

Sinclair went below, to soon return with the two revolvers. He retained one, passing the other to Ben Bolt.

"We can at least fight with what arms we have," he said.

"Ay, ay, ay!" exclaimed the crew, their courage rising under the influence of their brave young captain.

As many handspikes and crowbars as could be found were procured.

"As we haven't anything better, we can use these!" cried one.

Meanwhile old Ben stood with his glass pointed ahead.

"A waterspout!" he exclaimed.

The boys all looked in the indicated direction, to see a funnel-shaped cloud, having a long column, resembling an elephant's crooked trunk, approaching the yacht.

Here was double peril—the pirates abeam, the waterspout ahead!

But the speed of the latter was far greater than that of the coming boat. Soon it was so near that the broad patch of white water, with the spray rising therefrom, at least a hundred feet high, as the ocean was lashed by the descending column of water, was plainly visible, while the din made by the falling spout was like the continuous roar of heavy artillery, causing the frail yacht to tremble from stem to stern.

Meanwhile the lurid rays of the sun, flashing upon the millions of rising and falling drops of spray and silvery water, encircled them with multitudinous rainbows of beautiful hue, giving a strange, weird aspect to the picture.

Motionless, appalled, the young crew stood, watching that "demon-giant" of the sea, which was still bearing down straight toward them.

On it came, until within about a mile of them, when, suddenly, the huge column wavering, bending like a bow, gave a sidelong shear, and shot off in a new direction—on a line with the lee bow and away from it.

"We're saved from that chap, which has turned his snout to leeward," exclaimed Ben, as he hurled his quid toward the receding column, "and I wish we could say the same of them blasted cutthroats."

The pirates being now less than half a mile from the yacht, their dark faces, from which their low caps, with long tassels, were pushed far back, were visible; also the gleaming of the knives and cutlasses, which, such of them as were not pulling, waved about their heads.

There seemed no hope for the yacht's people. In a quarter of an hour, at their present rate of speed, the fierce Malays must board and cut to pieces that crew of boys!

"If we only had half an hour!" cried Ben, wistfully, pointing astern, where, in fact, the sea, crisped in little wrinkles, showed that a good breeze had risen, and was coming from that direction.

As he spoke, a sudden, peculiar expression crossed his sun-embrowned face. Up went the side of his mouth again, twisted nearly to the corner of his eye; he thrust both hands under his waistband, and nodded his head rapidly to his young companions.

"What is it?" inquired Sinclair.

"Jist look at that 'ere elephant's trunk!" exclaimed Ben, "and tell me if it ain't providential, won't ye?"

All the youths looked at the waterspout, to perceive that it had suddenly changed its direction—that it was now sweeping along, with terrific velocity, straight toward the pirates' boat.

The alarmed Malays, seeing it coming, altered the course of their boat, heading diagonally away from the yacht, hoping thus to escape the fearful visitor.

Pulling with might and main, they endeavored to get far enough to leeward for the water-

spout to pass between them and the yacht without touching their frail vessel.

Meanwhile Ben Bolt had sprung to the wheel. As mentioned, there was a breeze from the east, wrinkling the water astern of the little craft.

Soon it caught the sails, and away went the yacht on a northwest course, slightly increasing the distance between her and the proa.

The pirates were straining every muscle. The gigantic water-spout, sweeping toward them, was still on a line with their boat.

Like a living thing with its head in the clouds, and its feet in the sea, it bore down for them, writhing, twisting, hissing and roaring, as if in a rage.

But, just as it arrived within about forty feet of the boat, it swayed to one side, and the pirates were saved.

Curving like a bow, the spout swept on, astern of them, and, shooting to leeward, soon became dim in the distance.

The boatmen then boarded their vessel, the proa, which, under full sail, stood off in chase of the yacht.

The latter, however, being now under a press of canvas, the Malay did not gain on her.

Bolt hoped that, at night, he might "double on her"—that is to say pass her, unseen, in the darkness.

An hour after nightfall, he, therefore, came round on the starboard tack, and stood along, close-hauled with no light.

But the lynx-eyed Malays were not to be thus evaded.

Like a black snake, the long, low outline of the proa was suddenly seen through the gloom, not twenty fathoms ahead!

"Veer ship!" said Ben, quietly.

The boys obeyed, and away went the yacht, again on her northwest course.

At dawn the pirate was seen, a mile astern, still in chase. The beauty of the yacht evidently had captivated the fancy of the wild captain, who seemed determined to use every effort to make her his prize.

For a whole week he continued the chase—for a whole week the crew of the yacht beheld their evil-looking pursuer astern of them.

The two vessels being nearly matched in speed, the distance between them was neither increased nor diminished. Meanwhile the yacht, according to the reckoning of Bolt, had left her Australian port at least a thousand miles behind her.

All the boys except Sinclair looked disheartened.

"Cheer up!" the youthful captain would say to them. "We have provisions enough to last us a week longer. Besides, we may soon fall in with some friendly craft, which can assist us; perhaps we will even meet a sloop-of-war."

Toward twilight, on the eighth day after sailing, the young crew beheld a sail to leeward.

Bolt scrutinizing it through his glass, pronounced it a merchantman.

"She cannot therefore help us," said he.

As he spoke, an ominous cracking sound was heard, forward.

Sinclair ran out on the jib-boom, looked at it, a moment; then returned, to inform Bolt that there was a wide crack in the center of it.

The old tar shrugged his shoulders.

"It must have been strained in the gale," he remarked.

"We must splice it, and perhaps it will hold. We cannot afford to haul down the jib, with that rascal astern of us!"

Darkness was now closing round the craft. Sinclair and Bolt were advancing toward the boom, marlinspike and splicing gear in hand, when there was a crash, and away went the spar, breaking short off, near the staysail boom, the broken end dropping into the sea!

The old sailor and his companion looked at each other, and there was a cry of dismay from the rest of the crew. Deprived of her jib, the yacht's speed must be so diminished that, ere long, she would be overhauled by the pirate.

Suddenly, however, Bolt seemed relieved, while he pointed toward the Malay.

All aboard the yacht looked, to see the pirate heading away toward the sail to leeward.

"She has found better game than 'us,' d'ye see," remarked Ben, as he watched the hull of the proa, dimly revealed, gliding off in the darkness.

"Now, then, we can tack for home," cried one of the lads.

Sinclair compressed his lips, his eyes flashing. He and Bolt exchanged glances, the old tar seeming to understand at once the significant expression on the face of the youth. He shook his gray head.

"Unarmed, as we are, my lad, I don't think we can be of any use to that craft: still, if you say the word, we—"

"Ay," interrupted Sinclair, resolutely, "I do say so. We can at least lie to, and who knows what service we may not render some of the occupants of the merchantman? They might, for instance, attempt to escape in boats and we might have the good fortune to pick them up. What say, lads?" he added, glancing round him at his assembled crew.

"Ay, ay, ay!" was the hearty response.

The broken boom was cut clear, after which the yacht was headed on the same course as the pirate, which was now almost invisible in the darkness, about a mile off the lee bow.

Meanwhile the light of the merchant craft was seen not more than a league ahead of the Malay.

Several hours had passed. The yacht was now lying to within a mile of the merchant vessel, which the Malay had, by this time, evidently reached, for a faint hail was borne across the waters to the ears of the youthful crew.

The next moment the wild yells and screams of the pirates, the shouts of the other crew, the occasional report of a pistol, with the noise of blows being given and received, proclaimed that the pirates had boarded and commenced their attack.

Sinclair, restless and uneasy, walked to and fro, as these noises, sounding strangely in the darkness, and growing fainter every moment, were borne on the breeze.

He said nothing, but he would have given much to have been able to go to the assistance of the struggling merchantman.

Suddenly, distinctly heard above the other noises, came the cries of a girl.

Sinclair started as if he was shot. His clear voice, low but distinct, penetrated every corner of the yacht.

"Keep off there, at the wheel!"

"What are you going to do?" inquired Bolt.

"Bear down for that craft!" was the firm reply. "A girl needs help. We must rescue her, or run any risk in trying to do so!"

"I'm with you there, my lad," said Bolt, making up a curious face; then, pointing at a scar on the bridge of his nose, he added:

"That was the work of a once flame of mine—Sal Marton—with a gridiron, but d'ye see, it hasn't knocked *all* the chivalry out of my nature!"

Sinclair, providing himself with his revolver, and ordering his companions to have handspikes, crowbars and hatchets where they could be picked up at a moment's notice, stationed himself on the yacht's bow. The wind having freshened, she made good headway, and was fast nearing the merchant craft, aboard which the noises of the combat had ceased, when, suddenly, sky and sea were lighted by a lurid tongue of flame, shooting upward, evidently from the hold of the trading vessel, and setting fire to the main shrouds.

In a moment the blaze, creeping up the tarred rigging, was wreathing round the mast, which, soon, from deck to truck, presented the aspect of a burning column.

By the red glare, a number of the Malays were seen leaping into their proa, which lay alongside, and which they now evidently feared would take fire.

"The proa lies on the other side of the ship; the smoke and flame will screen us from the gaze of the Malays," said one of the crew.

As the yacht continued to approach the

merchant vessel, which, it could now be seen, was a large ship, was nearly one mass of flame.

Only the after part remained untouched, and on this Sinclair kept his gaze fixed, hoping to see the girl whose cries had been heard.

"Wouldn't advise your going nearer," said Bolt to the youth, when the yacht was within twenty yards of the burning craft.

"We can board in the gig," responded Sinclair.

"We might, if we was salamanders," answered the old tar; "however, we can try, although I don't think we'll find any gal aboard. In my opinion, them rascals has either cut her down, or taken her off captive."

"They have not taken her off," said Sinclair. "Had they done so, we would have seen her with them, when they boarded the proa."

The yacht was now brought to, and the gig lowered, accompanied by Ben and two others of the crew. Sinclair sprung into it, and the boat was directed under the ship's counter, when her name, "THE TEXEL," was seen, in gilt letters, above.

"Ay, ay!" exclaimed Sinclair. "As I live, it is the craft that contains my uncle's treasure!"

Seizing a dangling rope, the young captain climbed to the deck.

Ben followed him.

"Where are you going?" he asked, as the youth sprung toward the companionway.

"Into the cabin; we may find the girl there."

"We haven't but a few minutes to spare," cried the old sailor. "The fire has already nearly reached the quarter-deck."

They entered the cabin. It was empty.

"You see she ain't here," added Ben. "Come, let's get back to the boat."

But Sinclair was not yet satisfied. He advanced to the bulkhead, and peered through an opening into the hold.

"Is anybody there?" he called.

There was no response.

The roaring and crackling of the flames now were heard, as if directly overhead.

A thick volume of smoke, followed by a lurid tongue of fire, streamed into the cabin!

Ben seized his young companion by the shoulder, and drew him toward the stairs.

At that moment the youth was certain he heard a human voice, faintly calling. It came from the direction of the hold.

"It is a girl's voice!" exclaimed Sinclair.

Breaking away from the old sailor, he plunged into the hold. A dense cloud of smoke there drove him back. He turned round, drew a long breath; and made another plunge. Staggering on, he had not proceeded ten steps, when he heard the voice again, apparently under his feet.

He now realized that it came from the lower hold, on the hatch of which he stood.

He saw the ring of this hatch, pulled on it, and the opening was disclosed.

A face looked up at him, from below.

"Your hand?" he gasped, half choked with smoke.

The hand was raised. He seized it, and drew up from the hold, a girl, apparently not more than fifteen years of age.

Just then, there was a tremendous crash, above. It was the after mast, which had fallen, the shrouds and stays holding it having been burned through.

It struck the quarter-deck; the timbers gave way, and smoke and fire, with showers of flying sparks, streamed into the cabin!

"Quick, my lad!" shouted Ben, "or we are lost!"

CHAPTER III.

SINCLAIR'S PERIL.

THROWING an arm round the waist of the girl, lifting her with ease, Sinclair hurried toward the cabin.

This new contained many broken timbers, some of which were in flames, but, with Ben's

assistance, the youth succeeded in reaching the foot of the companion steps.

Just then, down through the companionway, rolled a fiery column, driving him back. The flames had reached the after part of the ship!

Sinclair and the old sailor looked at each other. Shut up in this burning craft, with the fire now almost surrounding them, they saw no way of escape!

Suddenly Sinclair's gaze fell on an ax in one corner of the cabin; from that instrument it wandered to the closed cabin window, which was too small for the passage of a human body.

The youth putting the girl in the old sailor's charge, snatched up the ax, and, rushing between some of the burning pieces of timber, was soon by the cabin window, the sash and shutter of which, with one blow of his weapon, he dashed open. Then he proceeded to knock away the framework, so as to enlarge the aperture.

Meanwhile the smoke and fire rushing into the cabin, were almost unendurable. Sinclair staggered in his work, and gasped for breath, but not once did he relax the force of his blows. Swiftly and with good effect they fell. The woodwork opened and dropped apart under the crashing ax. At last the aperture was large enough for a person to pass through it.

Then Sinclair staggered, and the ax slipped from his grasp. Sucked in by the draft of the window, long, snake-like columns of fire now were drawn toward the youth, the suffocating heat, added to his recent exertions, nearly overpowering him.

Ben, with the girl, was near the opening. Sinclair seized her quickly, with both arms, and, bidding the old sailor leap into the gig, which, by this time, had been brought astern, its occupants having been drawn thither by the sound of their captain's blows, he stood ready to pass to him the precious burden.

Bolt, soon in the gig, received the girl; at the same moment, the fire streamed through the opening and Sinclair fell back!

"Save him! save him!" pleaded the girl, wringing her hands.

Ben stood aghast. The fire now rushing, in lurid volumes, through the cabin window, formed a scorching barrier which no man could pass.

"Lost! lost! no hope for him, now!" cried the old sailor.

As he spoke, caught by a long swell, the brig rolled far over. This caused the burning timbers in the cabin, whence the flames issued, to fall to one side, when the fire column was seen to swerve from the window opening.

Bolt was not slow to take advantage of this. He sprang into the cabin, to see Sinclair lying, nearly suffocated and half senseless, a few feet from the window.

"Stand by, there!" he called to the boys in the boat.

Then, picking up the youth, he passed him through the window to his young shipmates, who deposited him in the gig.

Ben did not follow a moment too soon. The flames licked his back when he entered the boat, which was now pushed off.

Sinclair opened his eyes as the fresh wind blew in his face, and, raising himself on his elbow, his gaze fell on the girl he had saved. She sat near him, and had evidently been watching him with much interest and anxiety.

She was a beautiful girl of the brunette type, with brown eyes, smooth, oval cheeks, and long, shining, black tresses.

She wore a dress of some dark material, neatly trimmed, and setting off to advantage the round, flexible waist, which made one of the attractions of a form of unrivaled grace.

"You have recovered," she said, blushing, as she encountered the young sailor's gaze. "I am so glad."

In the red firelight streaming out on the water from the burning vessel, her eyes shone like stars.

Sinclair rose and sat down by her.

"And I am deeply thankful that you are saved," he responded feelingly.

"You were very, very brave to save me," faltered the girl.

The gig was soon alongside the yacht, when Mora Morton, which the rescued girl had stated was her name, was helped aboard. Sinclair conducted her into the cabin, and showed her a neat little apartment, which he informed her she might occupy while she remained aboard.

Sinclair then went on deck, to see Ben looking away beyond the burning remains of the ship, which had parted in the middle.

"That rascal will be after us again," remarked the old sailor. "So, you see, I have put back on our other course."

"Ay, it is time," responded the young captain, watching the proa, which he could now dimly see, heading toward the yacht.

The latter made good progress. Soon, the ship, having burned to the water's edge, the pirate was no longer visible in the deep gloom.

By morning the proa was seen far away, astern; still, however, in chase.

Mora Morton, having slept little, was early on deck, watching the pirate.

Sinclair, who, with the rest of the crew, had, throughout the night, taken his turn on the lookout, made his way to her side, politely lifting his cap and bidding her good-morning.

A moment, as she replied to his salutation, her soft, dark eyes shone upon him, then they were shyly veiled by the long lashes, while a bright, warm blush suffused the smooth cheeks and the white neck.

The frank, handsome face, the fine form, and the pleasant, easy manners of the youth who had so bravely rescued her, on the night before, could not fail to impress her favorably.

"How did you pass the night?" Sinclair inquired.

"I could not sleep," she answered. "I do nothing but think of the horrible fate of the ship's crew."

"Were you a passenger?"

"Oh, sir, ask me no questions, I beg of you," she said, tears springing to her eyes, and she with difficulty repressed a sob.

The girl seemed agitated. Sinclair forbore questioning her, although he was surprised that she made no explanations regarding her presence aboard the merchant vessel. Soon she left him and retired to her room. A moment after, Bolt joined him.

"Do you think your uncle's treasure was lost with the Texel, or that the pirates got it, before leaving the burning craft?" he inquired.

"I think they have it," answered the youth. "If I had a few guns, and a few more men, I would endeavor to wrest it from them."

"Land 'O!" sung out one of the lads forward — "right ahead!"

Sinclair procured his glass, and went forward.

"What do you think of it, Ben?" he inquired, passing the instrument to the old sailor.

"A small island," said Bolt, "although I can't make it out very plain, seeing as there's a fog coming up in that quarter."

Before long, the fog was so thick, on all sides, that the proa could not be seen from the deck of the yacht.

A few hours later the land was sighted, looming up through the mist which had cleared a little, about a hundred yards ahead.

Ben advised Sinclair to anchor off the land, in some sheltered bay, where the yacht's mast would not be visible from any passing craft. In that way, he thought, they could elude the pirate, who would probably go by without seeing them.

The little vessel was therefore brought close up to the wind, when, skirting the shore of the island, they finally rounded a high promontory, to soon behold a bay, which, bordered on two sides by rocks, would, they believed, serve their purpose.

Cautiously sounding as they entered it, they came to anchor within two ships' length of the beach.

Sinclair then sent one of the crew ashore to keep a lookout from the promontory, which

would afford a good view of the sea, on all sides, when the fog should have cleared.

The young captain, followed by Ben, now sprang into his gig, which, after conveying the lookout man ashore, had been brought back, and left alongside.

The two pulling to the beach, there left the boat and went to take a survey of the interior of the island. It was still partially obscured by the mist, but enough of it was visible to show it to be a place of almost paradisiacal beauty, with its bright, green grass, flowers, its cascades of gushing water, mossy rocks, valleys, and fragrant groves.

Ben and his companion had proceeded about a mile, when they came upon a high rock, rising abruptly in their path about twenty yards from the sea-shore.

They were about passing to the left to get round this obstruction, when, suddenly, Sinclair whispered to his companion:

"There is an opening behind the shrubbery at the base of that rock! I am going to see what it means!"

He tore the shrubbery, aside; thus disclosing the mouth of a cavern.

With their revolvers held ready for use, the two entered, passing along a narrow passage, which soon terminated in a large apartment, having a boarded floor, the sides and the roof being of solid rock.

The place was lighted by lamps fixed in brackets along the walls. On these, by large hooks and spikes thrust into numerous crevices, hung a plentiful array of cutlasses, pistols, daggers, and even boarding-pikes, while below, with their muzzles turned to the wall, were pieces of ordnance of brass and iron.

Among the latter Ben was surprised to observe a couple of large fifteen pounders.

"All these have been aboard some war-craft, you may be sure," said the old sailor. "Some craft which, perhaps, has been wrecked here-about and been abandoned."

Besides the small-arms and the ordnance, the two explorers discovered many other things. Among these were cases of liquors, coils of rope, spare spars, bales of goods, and barrels of ship's stores, such as beef, pork, hard biscuit and molasses.

"This is evidently the retreat of some Malay pirate band, probably the very one aboard the proa, from which we had hoped to escape," was Sinclair's opinion.

"Ay, lad, I believe you're right, and I think it was rash in us to venture in this place, as the Malay pirates must have left some of their number to take care of this place for 'em during their absence. They may have just gone out, and may not be far from here."

As the old sailor spoke, the murmuring of voices, with the sound of approaching footsteps, was heard.

Both gripped their pistols firmly. They could not now leave the cave without meeting those who were entering.

Nearer came the steps along the passage.

"There are many of them; they will get the better of us, my lad, if we stand," whispered Ben to the youth.

Then he pointed to a cask, behind which the two glided, just in time to escape the notice of the foremost man who entered. He was followed by six others, all Malays. They seated themselves on a rough wooden bench, in one corner, and conversed, earnestly, in their native tongue.

Suddenly one of them advanced toward the cask, behind which Sinclair and the old sailor had concealed themselves.

The man saw the two, when he was a few feet from the cask. With a wild cry of surprise, he drew his cutlass, while the others, sprung toward the spot, their upraised weapons, flashing in their hands!

CHAPTER IV.

THE TREASURE.

ON perceiving that they were discovered, the two yachtsmen sprang up, and made for the passage from the cave, followed by the Malays.

In the passage, both turned, leveling their revolvers at the two foremost of their pursuers, who were about drawing pistols from their belts.

Lighted by the lamps, the Malays, in their wide-spread trowsers, short jackets and low caps, presented an appearance at once fierce and picturesque.

Ere the fugitives could fire, three of the party discharged their pistols at the white men, over the heads of their two companions, who blocked the way in the narrow passage.

Sinclair felt a bullet graze his ear; two more were heard, clattering along the rocky sides of the passage.

Then there was another report as the two revolvers were simultaneously discharged, followed by a shrill cry of pain, as one of the Malays fell flat on his face, and the other on his side, with his knees drawn up almost to his chin.

Retreating with their faces to their foes, at whom they continued firing, until they had emptied every barrel of their revolvers, the young captain and his companion, having thus kept the Malays in check, gained the outlet of the cavern, unharmed by the bullets of the pirates, who had been too busy endeavoring to avoid the constant stream of shots from the yachts, to aim with much accuracy.

Out of the cavern, the two now ran in the direction of the bay, where their vessel was anchored.

They were not pursued far. Ere they gained the beach, they could see nothing of their enemies.

About twenty of the boys from the vessel were near the shore, to which they had swam on hearing the shots.

They had started in the direction of the noise, inferring that Ben and Sinclair were in trouble, and would need their assistance.

Their captain gave an account of his adventure.

Then he held a conference with Ben, after which he addressed his companions.

"There are only five men in the cave. We must capture that place. Once in possession of it, we may bid defiance to the pirates!"

"Hooray! hooray!" shouted the boys.

"There is no time to lose. We must be masters of that cavern before the proa, which is evidently bound here, reaches the island."

Ben and the young captain then boarded the yacht, taking with them six of the party, who were to remain in charge of the vessel. Then, having loaded their revolvers, and placed a few hatchets and crowbars in the boat, they returned ashore.

The hatchets and crowbars were distributed among the party. Ten of them were thus provided with implements; the others had only their sheath-knives, which they wore in the belts around their waists.

"All ready?" inquired Sinclair.

"Ay, ay," was the response.

With Ben and the young captain taking the lead, they all started.

They soon reached the entrance to the cave.

"Now, lads!" said Sinclair, as, with the old tar, he entered.

Cautiously they advanced, their weapons held ready for use.

Ahead of them, they saw the lighted, rocky chamber, but no signs of the Malays.

Sinclair quickened his steps.

"Not too fast, my lad," said Ben. "Depend on it, them rascals are hidden somewhere, thinking to pounce upon us unawares."

At length they gained the apartment. It was empty.

The boys looked surprised. Sinclair thought that the pirates had gone to bury the two men he and Ben had shot, and would soon come back; but the old sailor said he felt pretty sure they would not return, as they had doubtless believed they would be attacked by a large crew of armed men—the shipmates of the two who had discovered their retreat.

"Now, lads," remarked Sinclair, "you see around you a fine lot of small-arms and ord-

nance. Have you any idea of what I am going to do?"

His young companions looked at him inquiringly, and he went on.

"I am going to take plenty of these small-arms aboard the yacht, and also some of the guns. We must not only defend ourselves against the pirates, but we must also be the aggressors. My uncle's treasure is, probably, in the hands of these wretches, and must be wrested from them. I also intend building a sort of fort, making a stronghold of this island, for we know not how many of those pirate hordes may attack us. What do you say, lads—are you ready to join me in this undertaking?"

"Ay, ay," was the unanimous response.

Ben went outside to look at the shore, in the neighborhood of the cavern. He returned, saying there was a good depth of water within a few yards of the beach.

Sinclair then sent him with a few men, to bring the yacht round to this point.

Meanwhile the party in the cavern at once went to work.

Two six-pounders and one nine-pounder were, by means of some ropes, taken from the cavern, and dragged to the beach, to be ready for transportation to the yacht. Some barrels of beef, pork and sea-biscuits were also conveyed there.

Then the boys proceeded to arm themselves from the weapons hanging on the walls. The whole crew were in excellent spirits at having thus come into possession of such a good stock of arms and provisions.

"Here she is!" cried one of the lads, as the yacht suddenly emerged to view out of the fog, which was not yet dissipated.

Ben brought the vessel within a few yards of the beach, and let go the anchor. Some large, thick planks were then taken from the cavern, and placed, so that one end of each rested on the yacht's gangway and the other ashore.

Over this bridge, with tackles and ropes, the crew soon conveyed the guns aboard. Then came barrels of provisions, which were lowered into the hold.

Ben, who was a good carpenter, proceeded to saw, in the bulwarks, which, aboard this craft, were higher than usual, openings large enough to admit the muzzles of the guns.

"That will do for 'temporary,'" said the old sailor, when the task was finished. "The holes want trimming off. And, now, one very important thing has been forgotten, and that's the ammunition."

Small chests, containing ammunition, were brought from the cavern, and were conveyed to the beach, whence they were soon carried aboard. At this juncture one of the boys sprung on the bow, and peered earnestly through the fog.

"Sail 'O!" he cried, pointing off the star-board bow.

All the others looked, to see the shoulder-of-mutton sails of the Malay proa, not a hundred rods distant, just emerging from the mist.

On she came, her long, low hull gliding, with little noise, through the water, the dusky faces of her numerous crew visible above her bulwarks.

"She has men enough aboard to eat us, but she has no guns," said Ben. "She is almost at our mercy."

He ordered the nine-pounder to be run out; then, quickly loading the piece, he sighted it.

"Now, then, give it to the Malay!" cried Sinclair, who had brought a hot coal from the galley, in which one of the boys had been cooking dinner.

With a report that made the little yacht rock, the piece was discharged, and away went the pirate's mast, falling over the side.

It was cut clear, and now oars were run out from the sides of the low craft, which pulled away from the dangerous yacht, and soon disappeared in the fog.

For awhile the shouts and cries of baffled rage from the lawless gang were heard, but

at length they seemed to die away in the distance.

Sinclair wanted to give chase at once, but Ben dissuaded him from doing so. The old sailor thought it best to proceed with the erecting of a fort, as, in his opinion, they would need one before long.

From the cavern the boys obtained picks and shovels, with which, under Ben's direction, they went to work ashore. The site of the fort, which was to be about fifteen feet square, was chosen on an elevated promontory. Meanwhile, awakened and alarmed by the report of the gun, Mora Morton had come on deck.

Sinclair, however, soon quieted her fears; then he went on to describe the discovery and capture of the pirates' cavern, with all its arms, provisions and useful utensils.

"I am going to try and obtain my uncle's treasure," he added.

"There is too much risk," said the girl, trembling and turning pale. "Already you have been absent from your friends long enough to inspire them with the most dreadful forebodings as to your fate. You had better return to them."

"I will not do so until I have procured what rightfully belongs to my uncle, from the robbers," was Sinclair's firm reply. "Besides, I deem it the duty of myself and crew to cruise against these scourges of the sea, and punish them all I can. As to our friends whom we left, it is likely we will fall in, ere long, with some vessel bound to Australia, when we can send letters to them."

Mora Morton, as Sinclair spoke of cruising against the pirates, seemed much agitated, although she looked up at him with the natural admiration of her sex for spirit and daring.

The bright, handsome face, the clear, flashing eyes, the wavy brown hair, and the graceful, manly attitude of the youth, awakened in her gentle heart such feelings as she had never before experienced for one of the other sex.

"You think nothing of the danger—the great peril you will run," she said, softly.

There was on his face a look of mingled respect and tenderness, as he gazed upon the rounded, glowing cheeks, the supple waist and shy, dark eyes of the beautiful brunette.

She blushed deeply and smiled, while with one of her little gaiters, as she stood leaning against the rail with her ankles crossed, she lightly tapped the deck.

Insignificant as this movement was, it was noted with absorbing interest by Sinclair, who was of that age when every motion of a pretty woman seemed to him invested with an indescribable charm.

In fact, these two young people, drawn to each other, felt strangely happy when they were together.

"Will you go with me and see the cave?" Sinclair at length inquired.

"Yes," she replied, throwing over her head the little red, worsted shawl, in place of her hat, which had been lost aboard the burning ship.

Old Ben went with them to the cave.

"Here's a small chest which has not yet been opened," said the youth, pointing to one corner.

With a few blows of a hatchet, he soon knocked away the lock of the chest.

Mora uttered an exclamation of admiration, when, the lid being raised, several fine dresses and other articles of female wearing apparel were disclosed.

"You will please accept these," said Sinclair. "I am sorry there is not a hat among other things."

"There is some cloth there of which I can make me a hat," replied Mora. "I am skillful with the needle."

"But where is your needle and thread? I regret we have nothing of that kind aboard the yacht."

Mora, smiling, took from her pocket a little cushion, full of needles and also a spool of thread.

"I always carry my tools with me," she said with sudden gravity.

The chest was soon after conveyed aboard the yacht, when Ben and Sinclair went to superintend the work of building the fort.

Before night of the next day a good breast-work was raised, and five twelve-pound guns were then mounted.

Two were placed so as to command the sea, and one on each of the three other sides.

A guard of six of the crew was detailed to occupy the fort during the night.

On the next morning, a low, black schooner was seen approaching.

Mora seeing it, turned pale. At the craft, which was about a league distant, Ben Bolt was squinting through his glass.

"I can't make her out," said he, "but I'm inclined to think she's a peaceful trader of some kind."

"No! no!" cried Mora, "she is not!"

Sinclair took the glass. As the vessel drew nearer, he saw the glitter of something, for a moment, by her starboard bulwarks, aft; then he passed the glass to Bolt, saying decidedly:

"She is no trader!"

"How know you that?"

"I saw the gleam of one of her guns!"

"Then she must be a pirate!"

"A Malay?"

"She may be, as some of these fellows have such vessels, do you see, on purpose to deceive the merchantmen whom they want to over-haul."

When within half a mile of the shore, the schooner, a fore and aft vessel, could be distinctly seen.

There was in her appearance nothing suspicious, unless it was the lowness of her hull and the jaunty rake of her fore and mainmast.

Otherwise, she looked like a trader, having casks lashed, here and there, to her bulwarks, on both sides, and a tackle rigged over her main hatch, by which a man was hoisting something, probably a barrel, from the hold.

To the surprise of the yacht's crew, this person seemed to be an Englishman.

"You see you were mistaken about the gun," said Bolt to Sinclair, "there is none aboard."

"There certainly is none in sight."

The schooner had drawn a little nearer, and Sinclair, his suspicions now nearly dissipated, seized his trumpet to be ready to speak her.

All at once a strange expression crossed his face.

"What is it! What d'ye see?" queried Ben.

"Look along that heap of canvas, and you can see for yourself!"

The canvas alluded to was a heap, which looked as if it had just been brought up and thrown carelessly where it now lay on the weather side of the deck.

Under this heap Ben now beheld, only partially concealed, a number of black heads, and now and then caught sight of a hand or a foot. At one point he was sure he saw a cutlass, glittering in the sunlight.

"Ay, ay, she shows the cut of her jib, now, sure enough," said Ben.

As he spoke, the white man advanced to the bow.

"Yacht ahoy!" he shouted.

"Ahoy!" returned Sinclair.

"Is there a good watering-place on this island?"

"I have no doubt of it!"

"Well, then, I will go in and water here. My craft is from Calcutta; she belongs to Liverpool, and we are bound home."

"You had better keep off a little, my man, or you'll be afoul of us," said Sinclair.

The person addressed either did not, or pretended he did not hear him.

The schooner, meanwhile, was bearing straight for the yacht, on a course which, if continued, would cause her to strike the smaller craft amidship.

"Keep off, or I'll sink you!" shouted Sinclair, in a voice so loud that it could not fail to reach the men aboard the schooner.

The words had scarcely passed his lips, when the heaps of canvass on both sides of the deck, were suddenly thrust aside by about sixty

dusky Malays, all armed with knives, pistols and cutlasses.

As the men sprung up from under the cloth, four guns, ten-pounders, were revealed, two on each side, in places which the canvas had previously concealed.

The vessel was quickly luffed up, presenting her starboard guns toward the little yacht!

CHAPTER V.

THE COMBAT.

"LIVELY, there!" shouted Sinclair, waving his arm toward the fort, in which he had placed six men to be ready to point and discharge the seaward guns, at a moment's notice.

The pieces were loaded, and sticks, with the ends dipped in tar, were placed near them to serve as matches.

Now, therefore, the young captain had a chance to try the 'temper' of the young crew under his command.

Already the schooner's gunners were advancing toward their pieces, which, unless the boys in the fort should bestir themselves, would be discharged first.

The safety of the yacht depended on the conduct of the young guard ashore. The first of the two parties that fired, it seemed, must prove the victors.

Meanwhile Bolt was squinting along the nine-pounder aft, while Sinclair attended to the smaller one nearly amidships.

These guns might be made to do some execution, of course, but not a quarter as much as the large ones of the fort.

From the latter place, just as the Malay gunners were about applying their matches, came a stream of lurid fire, followed by a report that made the yacht tremble from stem to stern.

The crashing woodwork, and a clanging sound, and a wild shriek were heard!

The smoke clearing, Ben and Sinclair looked to see the effect of the two shots.

Off went the old sailor's hat, which he waved triumphantly about his head.

"A better shot was never made," he said to Sinclair. "We have dismounted their starboard guns, which they were about to 'pop' at us, do you see, besides doing other damage. Now our own must 'talk.'"

So saying, he snatched the lighted match that one of the crew had brought, and applied it to the nine-pounder.

The piece thundered, and away went the schooner's foretopsail yard by the run. Sinclair followed up this damage by carrying away the pirate's jib-boom, with one of the six-pounders.

The schooner's starboard guns having been dismounted, her crew were now endeavoring to bring their craft round, so that they could use the larboard pieces.

"Blast me, if I don't spoil that fun for 'em!" said old Ben.

The nine-pounder having been reloaded, he pointed it carefully and fired, his shot striking the schooner's main-mast, and carrying it overboard with a crash, just as the vessel's head was being brought round.

There was now much confusion aboard the craft. Soon, however, her two boats, loaded with their dusky crews, were seen to drop alongside, showing a design on the part of the pirates, to attempt the capture of the yacht by boarding.

"Stand by to repel boarders!" shouted the young captain.

His crew of twenty-four boys were soon ready to fight against more than twice their number. Sinclair looked around him with much satisfaction at their determined faces. Old Ben, however, smiled grimly, rolling his quid from side to side, in a doubtful manner. To tell the truth, he felt convinced that, at the first onslaught of the pirates, these untrained boys would be quickly mowed down by their older enemies.

The two boats were now rapidly approaching the yacht, in the direction of her bows, thus keeping out of range of her guns.

When they were still about a hundred feet distant, Bolt sprung from the deck of the yacht, upon the planks leading to land, and was seen making off!

The boys all watched this apparent flight with undisguised astonishment.

"Ben," called Sinclair, "what do you mean? I never thought to see you run from an enemy!"

But the old tar kept straight on, until he reached the fort, which he quickly entered, placing himself at one of the guns. This piece he carefully sighted. Then there was a report like thunder, as the weapon was discharged, the heavy shot striking the foremost boat, shattering it and killing several of its crew.

The rest, as the boat sunk, were seen swimming toward the schooner.

"Now, then, for the other boat!" shouted Ben, as he sprung to the second gun.

This he aimed carefully, and fired, his shot striking the remaining boat and cutting off the bow.

There was a cheer from the yacht, as the Malays were seen swimming for their vessel. This they soon reached, when, boarding the craft, they cut adrift the wrecked mast, and headed away from the island with only their mainmast standing.

As there was no more ammunition in the fort, Bolt hurried aboard the yacht, to make use of the small guns.

These were pointed at the schooner, and several shots were fired, damaging the hull of the pirate craft, ere her crew, by tacking, succeeded in getting out of range.

A few minutes later, the vessel passed round a high promontory, which hid her from the gaze of the yacht's crew.

"I believe," said Bolt, "that many of those rascals were from the proa, which we disabled a few days ago. The Malays, probably, have a rendezvous on other islands. There is a large gang of them, I'll be bound, and they have many different vessels."

"As that schooner was, however, their largest one, we needn't feel discouraged," remarked Sinclair.

The rest of the day was spent in lugging large quantities of ammunition from the cavern to the fort.

Just at dark, Sinclair, who had been assisting his crew, sat down near the entrance of the cave to rest, soon intending to follow his young shipmates, whom he had ordered to discontinue work for the day. Suddenly, chancing to glance up, he fancied he saw the outlines of several dark forms moving over a headland, in the distance.

Fond of perilous adventure, he resolved to steal near the spot and play the spy. Cautiously hurrying along, keeping himself screened by shrubbery, he finally gained a spot behind a rock, whence, through openings in the rugged mass, he could see the lately disabled schooner, lying within a hundred yards of the land, her yards lowered, her topsails clewed up.

Alongshore he beheld a small boat like a gig, which he had previously noticed hanging over the vessel's stern; and not far off, he could distinguish the sound of low voices.

Getting down on his hands and knees, the youth, by keeping in the shadows of low rocks, soon arrived within a few feet of a group of Malays, who stood about two yards from the boat.

One of them held a lantern, so shaded that the light, while it did not show above the headland, fell upon the forms and faces of the group, revealing also, on the ground, a large chest, which they had evidently lugged from no very distant point.

Soon another person—the Englishman who had spoken the yacht—came in sight, out of the darkness beyond the party.

"You have the treasure all safe?" he inquired.

"Yes, captain," answered one of the men. "We find 'him' all safe, where crew of

proa hid 'him' two days ago, before they know white men on island."

As Sinclair scanned the party, he was quite sure he recognized among them the Malays of the cavern, from which he and Bolt had escaped. These fellows, after burying their two dead companions, had probably hidden themselves, until they found a chance of boarding the schooner by swimming to her, either before or after she was disabled.

"The chest is too heavy for the gig," said the Englishman. "I don't see how, having lost our large boats, we are to get it aboard the schooner. Hark!"

The sound of voices was heard, not far distant, evidently those of some of Sinclair's party, searching for the missing youth.

"They will come upon us before we know it," said the Englishman. "We have no time to lose. We must not leave the treasure here. Come! I have an idea."

He went to the boat, and took therefrom a long, strong rope.

One end of this he fastened to an iron ring in the right side of the chest, which had previously been carefully locked.

"There, you see; the other end of the rope we take aboard the schooner; then we will haul on it, and pull the chest aboard."

The Malays, however, shook their heads.

"No get chest along that way," said one, "for rocks on bottom of sea catch him, hold him fast, and we lose him."

The voices approaching sounded nearer; the footsteps of the searchers were now heard.

"No time to spare," said the Englishman.

The chest was then conveyed to the water's edge.

"Me tink we lose," remarked one of the Malays who had spoken before.

"Ay," thought Sinclair, "for I will yet get it from you."

The party now entered the gig, taking with them the end of the rope, which they soon conveyed aboard the schooner.

As they began to haul, a sudden thought occurred to the yacht's captain. Drawing his knife, he waded into the water toward the spot where he had seen the chest sink, as it was pulled away from the beach. The rope receding, showed him that the weight, as yet unobstructed by rocks, was moving along the bottom of the sea. Already it was ten yards from the beach, evidently in deep water.

Through the darkness Sinclair could distinguish the outline of the rope, as it swayed up and down. He was a good swimmer, and the gloom would favor his plan, by hiding his movements from the crew of the schooner.

Placing the knife between his teeth, he struck out for the rope, which he soon reached. Holding it with one hand, he seized his knife with the other, and, with a few strokes of the keen blade, severed the strands, in such a way that they would present the appearance of having parted from the great strain upon them.

Swimming to land, the youth then felt for a loose stone, finding which, he rolled it near the edge of the beach to mark the spot opposite which lay the sunken treasure-chest.

Meanwhile he could hear the voices of his young friends, not far off, and could distinguish the dim outlines of their forms.

Soon, advancing, he met them.

"Found at last," said old Ben. "We thought we had lost you."

In a few words, Sinclair related what he had done.

"The treasure is ours, then," remarked one of the boys.

"Yes; I hope we will be able to get it up in the morning," said Sinclair. "Meanwhile, we must have a guard here to keep away the schooner's people. Fortunately, their two large boats having been destroyed, they cannot send more than five or six men ashore, at a time, and we can easily master them."

"We had better bring the yacht around here," said Bolt. "Those Malays are good swimmers, do you see, and so might contrive to send all their number here to attack us, when we would be worsted."

"True," answered Sinclair; "I did not think of that."

They all hurried to the yacht, aboard which was Mora Morton, whose eyes lighted with joy, when, by the vessel's lantern, she recognized Sinclair among those who had been away in search of him.

"You have been crying. What has happened? Has anybody here dared to speak harshly or—"

"No, no," interrupted the young girl, blushing crimson. "I have been crying, it is true, but it was because I was afraid you were lost."

The youth felt a thrill of pleasure at this artless confession of the beautiful girl. He related his adventure, adding that he believed he was now sure of his uncle's treasure, contained in the sunken chest.

As there was a good breeze, the crew proceeded to get up the yacht's anchor. Soon, the moon rising, lighted the waters around the island shores, enabling Bolt all the more easily to guide the little craft, when, at length, she was under way.

Rounding the promontory and standing along until they had gained the eastern extremity of the island, the crew, tacking, came in sight of the schooner.

A boat in shore, evidently the gig, was then seen rapidly gliding toward the pirate craft.

"They have been looking for their treasure," said Sinclair.

A moment later the boat glided alongside the schooner, which then stood out to sea.

"I would like to give chase to, and sink the rascal," remarked Sinclair.

"No use of that," said Bolt, "as, by so doing, you would be apt, do you see, to lose the chest. As to boarding her, we have not men enough for that, as they outnumber us two to one."

The yacht was soon anchored within twenty fathoms of the headland, opposite the sunken chest.

At dawn the schooner was no longer in sight.

CHAPTER VI

THE SEARCH.

AFTER breakfast, Sinclair repaired to the beach, taking with him Ben Bolt and seven men.

The stone, which the young captain had placed as a marker, was soon found.

The youth then took off his jacket and shoes, and ordered his boat's crew to pull out from the beach.

"I think it was about here," he said, when the light craft was a few fathoms from the shore, "that I cut the rope."

The crew were ordered to stop pulling, and, as the boat stopped, Ben proceeded to make soundings.

He reported ten fathoms of water, but felt in vain for the chest.

"Perhaps it was nearer," said Sinclair.

The crew pulled hither and thither about the spot, but Ben was still unable to feel the chest. At last the lead struck something, which seemed to be wood.

"I have it now, my lad!" cried the old sailor, joyfully.

Sinclair then sprang up and dove down under water. He reached the bottom, keeping his eyes open, and saw the chest!

Seizing the end of the severed rope attached to the ring, he rose to the surface with it in his hand.

The boat's crew cheered. They hauled the chest up and into the boat.

"I hope the rascals have not tampered with what was in it," said Sinclair.

The boys admired the chest, which was a handsome one made of camphor wood, polished so that it shone like glass.

With the key, hanging by a little chain near the lock, Sinclair unfastened the chest. As he raised the lid, revealing the glittering contents, there was a murmur of admiration from the boys.

Heaped together, were seen crosses, images

of saints, drinking cups, urns, vases, goblets and many other things of the kind, all of solid gold and silver. There were also rubies of dazzling luster, a few large diamonds set in gold lockets, and some massive gold bracelets.

Sinclair had reclosed and locked the chest, when, not a league distant, emerging from a bank of mist, a boat was seen, approaching.

"It is a party of white people," said Ben in surprise, passing his glass to Sinclair. "I can't think where they have come from, as there was no craft in sight, this morning."

The youth looked through the glass. He could make out the blue jackets, the round, blue caps of the crew, and could also distinguish, in the stern sheets, a person wearing the neat uniform of the navy.

In mute surprise, the young crew watched the approaching boat, which, as it drew nearer, they perceived was a cutter containing about twenty oarsmen.

When the boat had arrived within ten feet of the yacht's gig, the officer in command rose, smiling, and bowed politely to the youthful party. He was a handsome young man of twenty-eight with dark complexion, a ruddy healthy cheek and a fine form.

His crew were all young fellows, about his own age.

"I am glad to see white men," said he, "for, to tell the truth, we are half famished, and were a little doubtful as to the character of the natives of this island."

"Is your vessel far from here, sir?" inquired Bolt.

"I don't know where she is," was the reply.

"She was an American gun-brig—the Pelican, of ten guns. Two days ago, she lay off and on an island about two leagues from here to take in a supply of water. I was sent ashore with my crew, whom you see, to find a good watering-place. While I was looking for one, the brig, to my astonishment, stood away to the westward, and, although I pulled after her, making signals, she kept on, and was soon out of sight. I returned toward the island, but, seeing the natives, who dwell there, drawn up with spears and clubs to oppose me, I thought it best to give the island a wide berth and, therefore, turned off in this direction."

"A strange affair, sir," said Bolt, "your craft leaving you in that fashion. How do you account for it?"

"I don't know what to think of it, unless the men aboard had risen in mutiny, which I now believe they did. There were Portuguese and Spaniards among them, and they had shown much dissatisfaction ever since we shipped them. The truth was the captain was more severe with his men than I approved of, although I believe in strict discipline. Are you the captain of that yacht?" he added, turning to Sinclair.

"Yes, sir. We will go aboard, now."

The two boats were soon alongside, when the precious chest was conveyed into the cabin. The moment he boarded the vessel, the stranger's eyes seemed to beam with involuntary admiration as his gaze fell on Mora Morton.

Attired in one of the dresses found in the cave, and which fitted her as if made for her, the girl looked surpassingly lovely.

She had combed her beautiful hair back from her forehead, allowing her magnificent tresses to fall over her shoulders.

"Your name, sir, that I may introduce you," said Sinclair, aside to the young officer.

"Lieutenant Wilton," was the reply. Mora trembled and changed color during the introduction.

Sinclair explained to Wilton how she came to be aboard the yacht.

The lieutenant conversed with her while the table was being set for dinner.

Meanwhile some salt junk and biscuits had been served out to the cutter's crew, who were forward enjoying their meal.

After dinner Sinclair explained to the lieutenant his intention of cruising against the Malays.

"And I will join you," said Wilton, frankly extending his hand and grasping that of the

other, "if you will accept the services of myself and crew."

"I shall be glad to do so," replied the youth, "and I thank you for the offer."

While they were conversing, Sinclair noticed that Mora, who was near them on deck, was watching his companion with a look of peculiar interest. This did not surprise him, as the lieutenant, with his bronzed cheek, square-shouldered, seaman-like form and manly air, was well fitted to attract a gentle girl like Miss Morton.

The rest of the day was spent in rigging a new jib-boom, in place of the one that had been lost. A spare spar aboard was used for this purpose. It was admirably smoothed off by Bolt, who had brought with him from home a whole set of carpenter's tools.

While some of the crew were fitting it, the others were set to work polishing the brass pieces until they shone like mirrors.

In fact, thanks to the assistance derived from the new arrivals, the little vessel soon presented a wonderfully improved appearance.

Before night the young captain had completed the necessary arrangements for his cruise. He left seven lads in charge of the fort, and sailed away, just before dusk, standing off to the north and west.

At about ten o'clock the moon rose, lighting up the snow-white decks of the yacht and the brass pounders, the latter flashing brightly in the silvery rays.

Mora was seated aft, conversing earnestly with the lieutenant, her soft, dark eyes turned upon his face, her whole countenance beaming with interest. In fact, since the arrival of this young man, Sinclair had found little opportunity to engage the attention of the girl, who now seemed rather to shun him than otherwise.

"Let it be so," he sadly muttered to himself more than once.

Nevertheless he lost much of his cheerfulness, and went about feeling gloomy and almost irritable.

No girl he ever saw had appeared to him so attractive as Mora, and he had, before the lieutenant's arrival, looked hopefully forward to the time when he would ask her to be his wife.

At dawn a thick fog rested on the sea.

"There is a rock somewhere about here," remarked the lieutenant to Sinclair. "I passed it, in my cutter, the other day. You had better be careful, or you'll run upon it."

After a brief consultation with Bolt, the young captain resolved to lower a boat and send some of the crew to see if the rock was near.

Luffing up into the wind, he lowered the cutter, which had previously been hoisted aboard, and manned it with all hands under the charge of the lieutenant and Bolt. His reason for sending so many of his crew was that there might be men enough in the boat to tow the yacht speedily out of any strong current into which she might be drawn.

Just as the cutter disappeared in the fog, Mora Morton, who stood near the weather-rail, exclaimed, "What is that?"

Sinclair looked, to see a dark object, indistinctly seen in the mist, drifting toward the yacht.

"It is a small whale—a calf!" exclaimed the youth.

A harpoon was sticking in the creature, which was quite dead.

The captain, getting over the rail, made fast the end of a rope to the harpoon, thus securing the whale alongside.

"Perhaps, when the fog clears, we will see the vessel whose crew fastened to, and lost that fish," suggested the youth. "They will be glad to get it, as it is a sperm whale."

Hardly had he spoken, when, not twenty feet distant, the water rippled, then parted, as the enormous head and body of a huge sperm whale shot up from the surface, spouting furiously.

"I believe it is the cow whale—the mother of the calf," said Sinclair.

As the words escaped him, Mora uttered a cry of dismay, and shrunk closely to her companion's side.

The whale, with wide-open jaw, was making straight for the yacht, churning the water furiously with her flukes, as she came on.

Nothing could have been more hideous or appalling than that bristling jaw, with its formidable teeth, and that huge head, crusted all over with barnacles, which gave to it the appearance of having hundreds of little eyes.

On came the monster, until within a few feet of the vessel's bow, when, with a sudden, tremendous spring, she threw almost the whole of her enormous body out of water, performing the movement which by whalers is termed "breaching."

Gigantic and fearful, with her great fins outspread, seemingly poised almost on the end of her flukes, she hovered a moment, towering above the heads of Mora and the captain, who looked up with dismay at this great, living weight about to fall, with crushing force, upon them and the yacht.

CHAPTER VII

A DESPERATE STRUGGLE.

SINCLAIR, seizing the girl by the arm, drew her quickly to the other side of the yacht, just in time to escape the body of the whale.

With a terrific crash, the head of the monster struck against the rail, crushing it like an egg-shell, splitting it far along forward.

The tremendous weight brought the vessel down on her beam-ends, causing the main boom to swing round against the descending whale, whose head thus got foul of the sheet, when the enraged monster, catching the boom in her jaw, snapped it asunder from the mast, carrying it, with the mainsail, which was thus torn to shreds, into the sea.

Disengaging herself from the ropes and canvas, the whale again swam toward the yacht, her jaw, thrust far up from the water, wide open, as before.

Sinclair, who had been keenly watching the monster, now perceived that its head was on a line with one of the larboard guns.

He ran to the galley, in which there was a fire, and taking a hot coal from the stove, with a pair of tongs, he "touched off" the piece.

The gun roared, and the ball flew whizzing on its way, just grazing the barnacled head of the leviathan.

Under ordinary circumstances, a noise of this kind would have galled (frightened) the whale, so that she would have sounded (gone down), and not again have appeared near the yacht.

It is a well-known fact, however, that, when bent on avenging her slaughtered offspring, the cow whale, as a general rule, cannot be turned from her purpose by anything short of death.

Now, therefore, the monster rushed straight on toward the yacht, which, if struck by that powerful head and jaw, must be stove in by the blow.

The young captain, realizing this, and comprehending that the sight of the calf alongside the vessel, was the cause of the mother's rage, sprang quickly upon the back of the little whale, endeavoring to unfasten the rope he had tied to the harpoon.

But the knot had become so tightened by the strain upon it, that he was unable to loosen it.

Meanwhile, the cow whale, only a few feet distant, had, on seeing Sinclair's situation, partially turned, and was now making straight for him, to seize and crush him with her terrible white jaw.

The youth, unable to untie the knot, glanced down at the harpoon, to discover that the shank had worked so loose that it might be pulled out.

He gave the weapon a couple of powerful jerks, which freed it from the body of the fish; but he could not now ascend the yacht's side, for the calf had drifted astern, the rope

fastened to the harpoon having slackened up, as the pin, to which it was attached, had slipped with the strain upon it, from the broken rail.

That he might, at least, have free use of the harpoon, Sinclair now severed the rope with the keen edge of the barbed iron, which he then held ready for service.

His position on the slippery back of the drifting calf, was an awkward one. He could keep his place only by remaining on his knees, with which he braced himself so as to hold his body firm.

Before him, now but a few feet distant, was the jaw of the advancing whale, wide open to seize and crush him; he could look down into that white cavern of death, while, amidst the rough protuberances and crust of barnacles on the monster's head, he could see her spiteful-looking eyes, strangely diminutive, in comparison with the enormous bulk of her body.

He drew off the harpoon, grasping it with both hands, and, with all his might, darted it slantingly into the creature's body, just abaft (behind) the corner of her jaw.

Smarting with the pain, the leviathan, her enormous jaw yawning sideways, made a snap at Sinclair, who could now only avoid her by rolling off the back of the calf into the water.

Meanwhile, Mora, who, white with terror, had at first stood watching the perilous situation of the young captain, suddenly nerved herself to attempt the rescue of the youth.

Picking up a hatchet, she, with a couple of blows, severed the fall ropes holding the gig to the stern, and, climbing over into the boat, pushed it toward the captain, who was now in the sea.

The light vessel glided alongside the youth, and he got into it.

As he did so, up came the whale, which had dove under her calf, rising, with bristling jaw, directly in front of the boat.

Having no other weapon of defense, Sinclair picked up a hatchet in the craft, and made with it a blow at the monster, as she rushed at the boat. The blade struck the whale on the upper side of the jaw, but she seemed not to heed the stroke. Down went her head, and up rose her bristling teeth on each side of the frail vessel.

Mora shrieked with terror. Sinclair, throwing an arm round her waist, made with her for the stern of the boat.

In his dismay, however, he perceived that the whale's flukes were there, and he knew that, if he and his companion should touch them, which they could not help doing, if they should jump overboard, those weighty appendages, whose lightest touch is death, would deal them a fatal stroke.

The whale's jaws still remained open. The young captain wondered why their fearful owner delayed crushing the boat, which was now completely in her power.

"What shall we do? What can we do?" gasped the girl, white with terror.

Sinclair looked down upon the speaker, his eyes beaming with manly pity.

He would try to save her by sacrificing himself.

Unwinding his arms from her waist, he suddenly sprang into the sea, right alongside the whale's eye!

With an evil, baleful light, gleamed that small eye. Slowly the great open jaws sunk away from the boat, to inclose, the next moment, the form of the youth.

Shuddering, he shut his eyes, expecting to feel those terrible fangs crushing his frame.

But they did not close upon him. When several moments had passed he opened his eyes, to see the sharp fangs of the upper jaw above him.

He swam away. As he did so, the whale turned her great body to dash him to death with her flukes.

Sinclair did not wait for her to reach him with these. He swam at the monster's half submerged body, and flung himself quickly upon it. Then he drew the hatchet from his belt, in which he had placed it and dealt blow after blow upon the monster's hump.

But he might as well have saved himself the trouble, for the blade of the hatchet failed to penetrate the thick blubber.

Swimming forward, wildly beating the water with her flukes, the leviathan, rolling sideways, dislodged the youth from her back.

On she rushed, in her fury; then, endeavoring to turn, her head struck the yacht under the counter.

There was a crash, betokening that a timber had parted, followed by a gurgling sound, as the water poured into the hold!

The whale now made off toward her dead calf, which had drifted far astern, her jaw like a great, white scoop, still wide open, rippling through the water.

Sinclair comprehended, at last, that she would not shut it, on account of the harpoon, which having penetrated near the jaws, probably caused her great pain every time she endeavored to close them.

This it was which had evidently saved his and Mora's life, for, otherwise the monster would have crushed the boat with its occupants, when the little craft was between its deadly fangs.

Now rolling about, apparently in great agony, the whale partially lowering her upper jaw, dove down into the sea.

Sinclair swimming to the gig, which Mora had been endeavoring to move toward him with a paddle in the boat, clasped both the girl's hands.

"You are safe!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, because you would have sacrificed yourself to save me," she answered, looking up at him, admiringly. "You are very—very brave."

"I only did my duty," he answered. "I would willingly die for your sake, because—because—"

He was going to say because he loved her, but she let go his hands, and turned away from him, as if—so at least he thought—she dreaded to hear him say it.

"The yacht will sink. See! it is going down," she cried, pointing toward the little vessel, which, in fact, now lay with her lee rail almost submerged.

Sinclair paddled toward the yacht. The gig was within ten feet of her, when, with a sudden lurch, down she went, going under, until only half of her mainmast was visible, when, having struck bottom, she became stationary!

Sinclair turned pale. The two young people looked at each other, in dismay.

"What shall we do, now? What will become of us?" exclaimed Mora, wringing her hands.

The young captain now endeavored to soothe his fair companion.

"The cutter will soon be back. We can get to the island in her. As to the yacht, I am in hopes we will be able to raise her."

"But the cutter's people must have heard the gun you fired," said Mora. "It is very strange they do not come. Oh, I am afraid that something dreadful has happened to him!"

"Him?"

"I did not know what I said," cried the pretty brunette, hiding her face with her hands. "I meant the cutter's people—all of them!"

Sinclair turned away to hide a bitter expression. He leaned forward, peering through the fog and listening; but he could neither see nor hear any sign of the cutter. For an hour he waited; then he said to Mora, "Let us go in search of them."

He paddled the gig in the direction the larger boat had taken, as he moved on, shouting with all his might, but there was no response.

Suddenly, right ahead, through the fog, he fancied he heard the creaking of yards and ropes.

Then he distinguished the mast of an approaching vessel, looming up through the mist.

"Perhaps he—I mean they are aboard that craft!" cried Mora, joyfully.

"Hush!" said Sinclair, in a low voice, as the

hull of a schooner now became visible; "It is the Malay!"

He endeavored to turn the boat away, and put off in the fog, in time to escape being seen, but a shout from a man on the lookout showed him that he had been unsuccessful.

On came the schooner, a few fathoms further; then she was brought up into the wind, and her small boat, containing half a dozen dusky men, was lowered in pursuit of the two fugitives.

Ere Sinclair had proceeded far, he heard the voice of one of the Malays in the boat.

"Stop or me shoot you!"

The pursuing boat was not ten yards distant, with one of her dusky crew standing in the bow, leveling a pistol at the occupants of the gig.

The young captain perceiving that further flight was useless, stopped paddling, and, picking up the boat hatchet, stood ready to die in defense of Mora.

"Put down hatchet, or me shoot quick," cried the approaching Malay.

"Put it down," whispered the trembling girl; "you can do nothing against six armed men."

"I can perish in trying to defend you," he answered. "I do not think the man will fire. If he does I do not care much."

Even at this perilous moment, the girl failed not to distinguish the singular tone of bitterness with which he spoke. Her eyes flashed with a peculiar expression. She suddenly seized the hatchet, jerking it from the hand of the youth, and allowing it to drop into the sea.

"Forgive me," she said, gently; "but I hope I have saved your life—at least for the present."

Then, to the unbounded surprise of Sinclair, she waved her hand to the Malay, saying, in a quiet, commanding voice:

"Put up your pistol, Marno."

The man bowed submissively, and obeyed.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAPTIVE.

"WHAT does this mean?" inquired the youth.

Tears rushed to the eyes of the beautiful brunette.

"Ask me nothing, now," she answered.

The Malay's boat glided alongside the gig. Rough hands were laid on Sinclair; half a dozen knives were pointed at his breast.

"Hold!" cried Mora. "Harm him not!"

"We see what captain say," growled Marno; and he motioned to his crew to put up their knives.

They did so; and the youth was taken into their boat, which the girl also entered.

With the gig in tow, the boat was pulled to the schooner; then Sinclair was made to mount to the deck. Ere he could do so, Mora bounded lightly up the gangway steps.

As the youth reached the deck, there was a yell from the dark-skinned crew, who closed round him, brandishing their knives; but the girl placed herself in front of him, motioning the fierce band away. A moment later, the captain of the party—the Englishman who had spoken the yacht, when she was anchored near the island—made his appearance.

"So, ho! caught at last," he said to Sinclair. "You have played your part well," he added, turning to Mora. "We all thought you were lost."

The girl did not answer. Sinclair gave her a reproachful glance. She returned it, with a sad look, slowly shaking her head. Her soft eyes seemed to grow larger and brighter. They burned into the very soul of the youth. He could not help fancying, as he looked upon that beautiful arched neck, and those dark, glistening orbs, that there was a sort of serpentine fascination about this girl.

"Come with me," said the Englishman, taking her arm.

"Yes," she answered; "but first promise me you will not harm him."

The pirate captain frowned.

"And why should I promise that? Have you not brought him within my power?"

"He has saved my life twice," she answered. "I had no wish—no intention—of putting him in your power."

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"But he has taken away the lives of half a dozen of my men. Know that my Malays have been almost demoralized by him and his band of youngsters, who have so frightened them that they say this insignificant party of boys are little demons."

"You will spare his life?"

"I will do so for the present."

He said something in the Malay tongue to Marno, who ordered the men to thrust the youth into the hold.

This was done, and the hatch having been fastened over him, Sinclair found himself in total darkness.

Meanwhile the captain of the schooner went into the cabin with Mora.

"Now then, tell me everything," said he. "In the first place, why did you hide yourself away aboard the merchantman we attacked, and which her captain set on fire?"

"Because I wanted to die," she exclaimed.

"To die?"

"Yes. I would die a thousand times, if I could, sooner than become the wife of that bloodthirsty Mako!"

"Mako is powerful. He has great influence with the Malays; more than I, although he is my lieutenant. By marrying him you would more closely cement between us a bond, which, otherwise, may be broken, for Mako is treacherous, and, I have reason to think, begrudges me my share of the treasures we have taken from so many vessels."

"I can never marry him!"

"You shall."

"I will die sooner."

The captain raised his eyebrows.

"I am not afraid of that. You have not the courage. This has been proved. You have come back to me, instead of destroying yourself, as you say you intended."

"My life was saved." And she went on to describe most of the events which have already been related.

"So your coming back here was all accident? Well, it matters not. I thought I had lost you when I could not find you aboard the merchantman. As I have not, I shall carry out my purpose."

"Mako shall never be my husband."

"I say he shall. Why, what have you against him, girl? He is not handsome, but he is as brave as a lion. Do you love another?"

The girl bowed her face upon her hands.

"I do," she murmured, softly.

"His name?"

"That you shall not know. I carry it here"—laying her hand on her heart.

"It is one of our band. I will ferret him out; he shall die!"

"No—no!" cried Mora, wildly. Then she colored deeply, and hung her head.

"Your manner confesses that my guess was right!" cried the captain. Then he suddenly added, his eyes lighting:

"By the skies above us!—I know, now! It is the prisoner—that beardless boy, you were so anxious to spare! His fate is now sealed!"

"No—no! It is not he!"

She spoke steadily, looking him straight in the face, although she was deadly pale and her eyes glittered.

"Not he! I believe you speak falsely!"

"It is one you cannot harm!"

"Why then hesitate to tell me?"

"I hesitate no longer."

"Who is it?"

Slowly she raised her hand, pointing skyward, while, in her rich, organ-like voice, she answered, solemnly:

"It is God!"

The pirate captain shrunk back, abashed. Then he forced a laugh.

"Yes," she went on, "you brought me up,

or tried to bring me up to think that piracy and murder were right. You have taken me on your cruises, to inure me—to harden me to scenes of blood and death. But you know you have never been able to make me approve of such things. I have begged you, again and again, to give up this horrible life. Lately I have thought much. I have read by stealth, such good books as you thought you had hidden from me. I have learned that there is a God. Can you wonder, then, that I look with abhorrence upon such a man as Mako?"

"This is nonsense. I tell you girl, that you will like him as well as any other man, after you have married him."

At that moment Marno shouted down the cabin:

"Land in sight!"

The captain went on deck, and peered through the fog at the land, which bore ahead. Soon the schooner entered a bay, passing a couple of proas. When she was within a few fathoms of the shore, her anchor was let go. The noise of women's and children's voices was then heard, in the distance.

The schooner's sails were furled, after which the captain, with his daughter, went ashore, followed by a party with the prisoner.

As they walked on, the fog cleared, rolling away like a curtain, revealing the beauty of this isle of the sea, fragrant with flowers and shrubbery.

Here were groves, lawns, hills, valleys and sparkling cascades of limpid water. In some places the trees were covered with plants full of red and purple blossoms, twining about the tall trunks and hanging down, in graceful festoons.

At length Sinclair beheld on a wide tract of level sward, between high hills, the humble homes of the Malays, forming a village of neatly thatched huts of wood and bamboo, covered with palm leaves, some of the dwellings having rude porticoes in front. Numbers of swarthy men, women and children came forth to meet the sailors.

There was a brief conference among them when they met. Then some of the women, who had lost brothers or husbands aboard the schooner, during her cruise, ran away, filling the air with howlings and lamentations. A number of girls, many of whom were very pretty, with their long, black, shining hair and agile forms, crowded round Mora, who was evidently a great favorite with them, smiling upon and embracing her.

But she smiled not in return, looking sadly upon them and with difficulty repressing her tears.

In rolling clouds the fog was wafted away from the beautiful island. The shouts and laughter of the dusky girls became louder and clearer, as the bright sunshine stole down between the hills upon the fresh, green sward.

Soon one of the young women brought a rustic chair, in which Mora was to seat herself. Then a sort of crown of leaves and flowers was bound round her head, and fragrant garlands were hung over her shoulders and put around her waist.

A Malay youth played a flute, and all the girls standing by the rustic seat, began to sing. The song was a strange refrain, but, as the voices were rich and melodious, it was in harmony with the wild beauty of the singers, who soon began to circle in a dance about the occupant of the chair, their loose, flowing cotton robes, naked ankles and feet allowing perfect freedom and grace of movement.

Mora, watching them, tried to smile, but there was an expression of deep melancholy in her soft eyes. Her thoughts seemed far away. Crowned with flowers and garlands, she looked surpassingly lovely, seated on that rustic throne. Sinclair, who had been placed not far distant, guarded by some of the Malays, with whom was Marno, gazed at the girl like one entranced. Her beauty—the womanly magnetism that seemed to emanate from her, thrilled him to the soul.

Why would she not look at him?

Vainly he hoped for just one glance. She

would now and then gaze over him but not at him!

Calm and sad she sat, as if too proud to notice him!

Marno remarked his gloomy face and kindling eye.

"You no like," he said, with a cruel laugh, "you no like to hear sing, because you know you going to die. Girls always come round Mora and sing and dance, when she come back from the cruise, because they love her. She queen of island."

Suddenly the eyes of the girl lighted with joy. A warm, bright blush mantled through the clear, olive skin of the smooth, round cheeks.

Approaching footsteps were heard. From the shrubbery, on Sinclair's left, appeared the manly, square-shouldered form of him who had given his name to the youth as Lieutenant Wilton.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEATH RING.

GLANCING at the prisoner, as he passed him, Wilton returned his stern gaze with one of laughing defiance.

Then advancing to the rustic throne, he clasped one of Mora's hands, and pressed it to his lips.

The girl's eyes sparkled. She laid both tiny hands upon the shoulders of the young man. Love and tenderness were in her gaze, which was fixed steadily on his face. She conversed earnestly with him, in a low voice.

Sinclair's heart sunk within him.

She whom he had befriended, whose life he had twice saved, would not, now he was a miserable captive, bestow upon him even a kind look.

Wilton was evidently her lover.

What deceit she had practiced! When she had met him aboard the Swan, she had not shown the slightest sign of recognition.

Where were his young shipmates now! A horrible fear that they had all been slaughtered—brave old Bolt with the rest—by the pretended lieutenant and his men, forced itself upon him.

Completely crushed and hopeless, his head sunk upon his breast. He heard approaching footsteps. Looking up, he saw Wilton before him.

"Rascal! what have you done with my crew?" inquired the youth.

"Better ask what *they* did with *us*!" replied Wilton.

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this: I had laid a plan to capture you all. I had intended to bring you all, your yacht included, into the power of my Malays. For that purpose, with my men, I visited your vessel. This morning I left your craft, with your crew and mine, as you know, ostensibly to look for a rock in the sea, but in reality to board, if possible, the schooner, which I judged could not be far distant. I had seen a freshly cut pine-apple floating in the water. I inferred it had been thrown overboard a few minutes previously from the schooner.

"To board this vessel, and thus put your crew in the power of our pirates, was now my plan. Should I not find the schooner, I intended to return to the yacht, and run the risk, as I had at first meant to do, of taking the vessel to this island, and surrendering her to the Malays, ere you could suspect me.

"My plan failed. I heard the creaking of the schooner's yards through the fog, ahead. That old Bolt, confound him, seemed to suspect she was the pirate, and I could not induce him to board her.

"He eyed me keenly, as I strove to urge him to go to the craft, telling him that I thought, if we made a good fight, we might master the Malays. His suspicions were excited. Just then bang! went a gun from the yacht. The old fellow insisted on returning. My men looked at me then; taking the tiller from my hand, he ordered them to pull.

"Traitors!" he exclaimed.

"He leveled his pistol at my head. I raised mine, but ere I could fire, one of your boys knocked me down with a blow from an oar.

"Then there was a brief combat. Your crew being in the majority, were the victors. Four of my lads were killed; two of yours were slightly wounded.

"Bolt directed the cutter to where we had left the yacht. We were astonished to find her under water, with only her mast half out. Ten fathoms distant, a rock was visible, revealed by the partial clearing of the fog.

"Bolt, directing the cutter there, got out on the rock to examine it, making the boat fast to a spur by her warp. He evidently had thought of raising the yacht at some future time.

"His crew got out on the rock. Boylike, their curiosity got the better of their caution. The old sailor ordered them back into the boat. Before they could obey, I cut the warp with a blow of a hatchet, and pushed the cutter clear. The bullets from your party's pistols sung about my ears; but, fortunately for me, and unfortunately for you, none of them hit me. The fog soon hid me. My lads pulled the cutter to this island, and here I am! I was surprised that you got here before me."

"I am glad my men are safe. As for me, I care not how soon your rascally set put an end to my life," said Sinclair.

The Malay girls were still dancing and singing. Mora seemed no longer sad. Now and then she and Wilton exchanged smiling glances. Her eyes sparkled, her face was radiant. Cruel—pitiless, as well as deceitful, Sinclair deemed her. She could smile and be happy, when he was a doomed prisoner.

And yet, how lovely she was—this beautiful young queen of the island!

At length the pirate captain, who had entered one of the huts, reappeared, accompanied by a hideous-looking personage. This was a Malay having an enormous head. His shoulders were of Herculean breadth, and his arms very long. He had slender, crooked legs, and his feet were shaped something like the hoofs of a horse. From his forehead to his chin, seeming to divide his face into two parts, extended an ugly-looking scar, adding to the repulsiveness of his coarse features.

This was Mako—the man with whom the captain wanted Mora to wed!

At sight of him the girl trembled. He advanced, smiled upon her, and held out his hand.

"Welcome, queen," he said, in a voice like the growling of a lion. "Glad to see come back."

She shrunk in her seat. Mako turned away, frowning, and walked to the spot where stood the young prisoner.

"A boy!" he said contemptuously, and turned away.

"Yes, he is only a boy," said Mora, who had left her rustic throne. "You will let him go!"

Mako's eyes flashed terribly.

"Me see! you love!" he said.

Whirling on his heel, his face turning almost as black as a negro's with hatred, he drew a heavy krees, and aimed a blow at the youth.

The girl glided between the prisoner and the upraised weapon.

"No, I do not love him!" she cried. To Sinclair these words were more unwelcome than the cutlass would have been. At least so thought the miserable youth.

"Why ask for life?"

"Because, he has twice saved my life!"

The Malay sheathed his weapon.

"Mako never spare prisoner," he said, "but not kill, now. Only boy—plenty time enough."

"True, he is but a boy," said Wilton. "But he has frightened our men. He can show a good fight."

Mako smiled grimly.

"We try in the death ring!"

"No—no!" pleaded Mora, aghast—"do not." Wilton whispered something in her ear. She instantly became silent. Then Mako spoke to the Malay guard, in the native tongue. Sin-

clair was then led off by his guard, who took him to a dark cavern in a rock. He heard a clanking sound, then felt a chain passed tightly round his middle, and the Malays went away.

Sinclair moved a few steps, to find himself held fast. He knew that he was chained to the side of the rocky cavern. There was a mat under his feet. He perceived that the chain was long enough to admit his lying upon this mat, which was to serve him as a bed.

Toward night he heard footsteps. Soon a light flashed into the cavern. The person who held it was the pirate captain. Mora accompanied him. She carried a wooden dish, upon which was pine-apples, oranges, and bread-fruit. She laid the dish upon a projecting shelf near the youth.

"This is for you," her cold voice and manner chilled him. He looked at her, but she returned the glance calmly. The pirate captain watched her, with a look of evident satisfaction. She turned away, without deigning the prisoner one comforting word or look, and left the cave with her companion.

The youth felt as if his very spirit was crushed within him; he would have been willing to be cut down with a sword where he stood. The pirate captain proceeded to his hut, where Mako was waiting for him.

Seeing this man, Mora turned away. Soon she was joined by Wilton, with whom she strolled off to a small grove. The two seating themselves under a tall camphor tree, conversed together, in a low, earnest voice.

Meanwhile Mako was talking to the captain. "Too long we have waited, now," he was saying. "We will make Mora wife, to-morrow. You tell her."

"Be it so," answered the other.

"After white boy been killed in death ring?"

"You intend, then, that the prisoner shall be put in the ring, to-morrow?"

"Yes. When sun rise. Me have pick out the best fighters. Boy cannot break through."

"If he succeed in breaking through—what then?"

"Me let go free. But me tell you, he no break through ring. Me pick out twenty good men; if he get past all rest, he no get past me," and Mako, drawing up his enormous chest, placed a hand on the hilt of his heavy cutlass. The captain shrugged his shoulders.

"I should think not. I would not like to be the one opposed to you."

The Malay smiled grimly, from gratified vanity.

"Where are the nineteen you have chosen?"

"In big hut. Me tell 'em go sleep early, so as to be in good 'strong' for fight."

Five hours later everybody in the little village had gone to rest.

At length, however, a figure stole from one of the thatched dwellings, and entered the big hut.

The light of a lamp in the hut fell full on the face and form of the intruder—Lieutenant Wilton.

The nineteen Malays lay asleep on mats. The young man moved among them, waking each with a shake.

They raised themselves on their elbows, and glared at Wilton.

"Why you wake?" inquired one. "Mako say we must sleep well."

"You may go to sleep again. But Mako should have given you something to brace yourselves with, for to-morrow's work. See what I have brought you!"

He took from under his coat a couple of large bottles, at sight of which the Malays sprung up, their black eyes glittering.

"Brandy! brandy! Give! give!" cried one.

"Hush! Mako may hear you."

Then the young man passed the two bottles round among the nineteen islanders, each of whom took a long, deep draught.

"Now you may go to sleep," said Wilton, as he left the hut, after the two bottles were drained.

It wanted only two hours of dawn. At daylight the nineteen Malays were waked.

They partook of breakfast; then they were called before Mako.

He inspected them, rather carelessly; otherwise, he would have noticed that their eyes were duller than usual, and more sunken. At sunrise the ring was formed on the green—that is to say, the twenty Malays, including the hideous form of Mako, stood in a circle, their drawn cutlasses in their hands.

Near the ring stood Wilton and Mora, behind them many other spectators.

Meanwhile, the pirate captain had proceeded to the cave. He found Sinclair awake, leaning dejectedly against the cavern wall.

"Your time has come."

The youth looked up, not understanding him.

"Here," said the captain, presenting him with a stout buckler, made of wood, covered with a buffalo's hide. "You will have to make a good fight."

He then went on to explain that it was sometimes the custom of the Malays, to give a criminal a chance for his life, by putting him, with sword and buckler, in the center of a ring of armed men, that he might try to fight his way through it. If successful in breaking through the ring, his life was saved.

"Not often is the ring broken through," continued the captain, "by even a strong man. You may, therefore, know what to expect."

A few hours before, Sinclair had wished for death. Now his heart swelled with a wild hope that he might succeed in saving his life.

He would, in that case, rejoin Bolt and his young companions, perhaps raise the yacht and again cruise against the pirates. Now that he could not hope for the love of beautiful Mora, a desperate, adventurous life seemed more attractive to him than ever.

The Malay guard took off the prisoner's chain, and he was conducted to the center of the ring of armed men.

He took his place firmly, seized the cutlass, which was then presented to him, and looked round at the dusky crew with whom he was to do combat.

"It is time!" called the pirate captain to the youth. "Begin, if you have the courage."

Sinclair had noticed that all the Malays around him, with the exception of Mako, were trembling, as if suddenly seized with an ague fit.

This surprised him, but he had no time to reflect upon it. Holding his buckler on his left arm, he rushed at one of the Malays. With one blow of his cutlass, he knocked the man's weapon from his grasp; then he whirled round as the others closed about him.

But Mako was now the only person he had to contend with, for the others, after a few weak, futile blows, *dropped to the ground in convulsions!*

The gigantic Malay strode toward the youth, aiming a tremendous blow at his neck. Sinclair received the weapon on his buckler; then he made a lunge at the body of his adversary. Mako avoided the blow by stepping aside, then rushed at the youth again with the fury of a lion.

The young captain now had enough to do in parrying the man's blows, without returning them.

At length he thought he saw a chance for making good use of his cutlass. Springing suddenly to one side, he made a thrust at the giant. The point of his weapon penetrated the mantle directly over the Malay's heart, but it had barely entered the flesh, when, with a tremendous blow, the pirate knocked the cutlass from his opponent's grasp.

Unable to recover his balance, owing to the impetus of his body, when he made the thrust, Sinclair fell forward on one knee. Ere he could rise to his feet, Mako had sprung behind him, his broad blade lifted to deal him such a blow as would sever his head from his shoulders.

CHAPTER X.

END OF THE COMBAT.

In another second the keen edge of the cutlass must have done its work; but half-way in its descent, it struck, with a clash, another cutlass, which had suddenly been thrust out over the imperiled youth.

The protecting blade was in the hand of Wilton, who had sprung forward as Sinclair stumbled.

There was a shout of surprise from the spectators.

Mako, his blow warded off, turned, black with rage, upon the young man. The latter dealt him, on the temple, with the hilt of his weapon, a stroke that leveled the giant senseless to the earth.

A murmur, like the growling of a lion, was heard among the Malay spectators. With threatening looks, they advanced toward Wilton. Meanwhile, the pirate captain stood perfectly livid, surprised at the audacity shown by Wilton, in striking down the powerful Mako.

"What have you done?" he exclaimed.

"You will be torn to pieces."

The young man calmly watched the approaching Malay. Mora had sprung in front of him, as if to shield him from the angry throng.

"You see!" exclaimed Wilton, in a loud voice, pointing at the men of the ring lying on the ground in convulsions. "It was not a fair fight. These fellows have been taking too much palm-liquor, and have probably also chewed too much camphor gum. That was the reason I knocked Mako down. I thought it best to have another ring formed for the prisoner to fight against. I will take him back to the cave, and I hope that, to-morrow, we will see a fair combat."

Wilton, being next in command to Mako, had always been much respected for his nautical skill, and for his bravery by the dusky seamen, who had hitherto readily obeyed his commands. Now, however, they continued to advance, their knives, kreeses and cutlasses drawn.

Nevertheless they seemed undecided; perceiving which, the pirate captain advanced, and, addressing them, in their native tongue, said it was best to leave the punishment of Wilton to the man he had struck—to Mako himself, at which the Malays uttered shouts and yells of approval.

While they were gathered round the prostrate men of the ring, Wilton, taking Sinclair's arm, led him toward the cavern, followed by Mora and a party of the islanders.

Arrived at the cave, one of the Malays seized and fastened the chain about the prisoner's waist. The light of the torch carried by a youthful islander, showed the angry eyes and scowling visages of the dusky crew.

A moment later Sinclair found himself in solitude. He heard the receding footsteps of those who had brought him here; but, a few minutes later, he felt a hand on his arm.

"It is I," whispered Wilton, slipping a key in his hand—"unfasten your chain, leave the cave, and run to the right. The beach is a hundred yards distant. You will there find the cutter. I will soon join you!"

"How is this? You wish to save my life; you who maneuvered to bring me here?"

"Ask no questions."

The youth heard Wilton's receding footsteps. He unlocked his chain, as soon as possible, and emerged from the cave.

Thick masses of shrubbery screened him from the gaze of the islanders, assembled about the village. Running to the right, as directed, he gained the beach, to see the cutter, which he was about entering, when he heard a cry behind him. Turning, he saw a Malay, on a lofty rock, leveling a pistol at his head.

The man fired. Sinclair fell on his back, a stream of blood trickling from his temple—but the bullet only had struck his temple, slantingly, with sufficient force to deprive him of his senses.

When consciousness returned, he found himself in the cutter, out at sea. Wilton stood in the stern sheets sculling the vessel, and Mora sat bending over the youth.

The girl's eyes lighted with joy, when she saw him recover. The cold indifference of manner the youth had noticed on the island was no longer perceptible. Her whole face wore a tender expression.

"Beautiful queen!" cried Sinclair, impulsively. "I am so glad you are here."

He grasped one of her hands, his eyes bright with love and admiration.

A warm blush suffused the smooth, olive cheek. Then she suddenly became grave and cold.

"Sit down," she said. "I am busy. The cutter is not yet out of sight of the island."

Her calm, even voice chilled the youth. He returned to his seat, and picked up a paddle to help work the vessel. As he did so, Wilton drew in his oar. Smiling he sat down by Mora, and put an arm round her supple, flexible waist. She did not chide him—did not attempt to disengage herself.

"We are so far from the island, now," he said, pressing a kiss upon her cheek, "that we can put up the sail."

He rose, and politely asked Sinclair's assistance to step the mast. A minute later, the cutter was making good speed, under her mainsail.

"Now will you tell me why you have saved my life?" inquired the youth.

"Because Mora wished it," answered Wilton. "She is kind and would not see a fly harmed. That Malay came near stretching you out," he added. "A hair's breadth more toward the temple would have finished you."

"Why didn't he kill me, after I fell?" inquired Sinclair.

"Because I happened to come along in time to prevent him. He was advancing on you, when I knocked him down with a blow of my pistol! With the help of Mora, who was with me, I picked you up, and put you in the boat."

"Whither are we now bound?"

"I am going to the island where you built your fort."

"We had better stop, on the way, and pick up Bolt and the rest, whom you left on the rock, when you escaped in the cutter."

"We will do so."

In a few hours they gained the rock. It was deserted!

"What can have become of them?" cried Sinclair, anxiously.

"God only knows," replied Wilton. "See! there is the mast of your yacht, half out of water. At low tide, her hull would be left high and dry."

Two hours later, the cutter arrived at the small island. The fort was still there, but there was no sign of a human being in or about it. The three went to the fort, but Sinclair's young shipmates were gone. The island was searched for them without success.

"It is very strange," said Sinclair.

"I hope they have not been snapped up by some one of our Malay proas," remarked Wilton.

The three concluded to take up their quarters in the cave.

At night, unable to sleep, Sinclair rose and walked out. The moon was shining brightly. It revealed to him a scene that convinced him there was no hope of his winning the love of beautiful Mora.

Seated on a mossy rock were she and Wilton, the latter with his arm round her waist, her head resting on his shoulder.

Sinclair returned to the cave, to throw himself down on the mat, which served him for a couch, but not to sleep.

"Lost—lost to me," he muttered, bitterly. "I must try and forget her; but I can never do so while she is where I can see her."

At last he sunk into an uneasy slumber, from which he was waked at dawn by Wilton.

"Come," said the latter. "There is a sail in sight—evidently a merchantman. We will

go out to her, and she will, probably, at least take us out of reach of the Malays. Depend upon it, they will visit the island, sooner or later. I, for one, would not care to get in their clutches, after what I have done."

Sinclair went to the beach with the young man. Mora was already there.

"See!" she cried, joyfully, pointing far away. "A sail. There is a mist here, and they would not see our signal. So we are going out to her in the cutter."

"It is well," answered Sinclair, quietly. "It is the best thing you can do."

"You speak as if you were not going with us," said the girl, in surprise.

"You are right. I prefer to stay."

"Are you mad?" inquired Wilton.

"No," answered Sinclair, bitterly. "I mean what I say."

Mora turned pale. Tears rose to her eyes.

"You will go with us," she said, beseechingly, clasping her little hands.

"No," he replied, coldly.

Vainly the two endeavored to alter his determination.

"We cannot leave him here," cried Mora, in a voice of agony, turning to Wilton.

"There seems to be no other way. He may escape the Malays. Some friendly craft may pick him up. If we meet one bound this way, we will send it here."

"Good-by," said Sinclair, turning and walking off.

Mora called him back, but he moved on. A minute later his form disappeared behind a high rock.

The girl stretched out her hands; her lips moved, but no sound came from them. She staggered back, and fell, unconscious, in the arms of Wilton.

"A soft-hearted thing," muttered the young man, as he looked down on the pale face. "She would not see a dog come to harm."

He bore her to the cutter, and laid her in it. Then he sprinkled water on her face. As she was opening her eyes, he unrolled the cutter's sail.

A moment later the boat was gliding off toward the merchant ship.

When Mora recovered full consciousness, the little vessel was a hundred yards from land.

Sinclair, from a rock, watched the receding boat, until it became a mere speck.

"Gone," he muttered. "She is gone, and I am alone!"

Several days passed. A prey to melancholy, Sinclair had vainly endeavored to turn his mind away from the beautiful girl—the only woman whom he thought he could ever love.

Hither and thither about the island he roamed. He became pale and thin. The fragrant flowers, the green, waving bread-fruit and camphor trees, the rippling cascades, the music of the hundreds of beautiful birds that sung and fluttered about him, had no power to soothe him.

There was plenty of provision in the cave, but he seldom tasted it. He seemed to have but one thought, and that was "Mora." Through his brain, at all times, seemed to ring these words: "She has left me! She has left me!"

Sometimes he would plunge into some dark thicket, where the rays of the sun could not penetrate. There he would sit, thoughtful and gloomy, for hours.

One day, after having wandered about beneath the scorching rays of the noonday sun, he went further than usual into the depths of one of these thickets.

Suddenly, ahead of him, he beheld a strange-looking object. At first he supposed it was a human being; then, approaching nearer, he believed it to be a gorilla. Finally he perceived it was neither.

It stood about five feet high, and was near the bank of a stream. It had two rough legs, its feet were roots, adhering firmly to the soil; it had a body and a head, the latter with holes instead of eyes.

Sinclair was soon near enough to discover

that two appendages projecting out on each side of it, instead of being arms and hands, were stems, held back by tendrils, which, from an adjoining tree, had caught round them. At the extremities were flowers, whose petals, being shaped like human fingers, might easily deceive the beholder at a distance.

His curiosity excited, he advanced close to the singular object, and inspected it. It was a species of that plant called the mandrake. Two or three large, pulpy berries of a yellowish color among the petals, had, in some way, been crushed. The strong, fetid odor, emanating from these berries, penetrating to the brain of the youth, made it reel, for the mandrake is a poisonous plant, every part of which is strongly narcotic.

Sinclair turned to leave the spot. As he did so, his foot struck against one of the lower roots of the plant, when he fell against the mandrake. In falling, his outstretched hands struck the two stems of the plant, projecting out on each side of it like arms.

The tendrils holding these stems parted, with a snap, when the two elastic appendages closed tightly about the form of the youth, holding him fast to the vegetable monster!

He struggled vainly to release himself. Meanwhile the strong odor from the berries made him weak and faint.

His hand wandered to his waist; he felt for his knife. Suddenly he remembered he had left both knife and belt in the cave.

He seized the two stems, with both hands, endeavoring to pull them apart. But the deadly, poisonous odor had now reduced his strength almost to that of a child's.

A strange lassitude crept through his frame. A cold perspiration came out all over his body.

The hot, noonday sun, beneath which he had previously been wandering, had so affected his head, that it was morbidly sensitive to the exhalations from the plant.

Soon a trembling seized him. His struggles ceased, his head drooped against the mandrake. In this position, he could see through an opening in the thicket the high waters of the ocean beyond. Tantalizingly, the blue waves rolled along, curling before the pure, fresh breeze, which would have been so grateful to the suffocating youth.

Gradually the waves, to his confused sense, looked like burning streams of lava. A hot, noxious vapor appeared to rise from them. The atmosphere seemed to become of a sulphurous hue.

All at once, rounding a lofty headland, he beheld a vessel—a yacht, painted white, but seeming, every moment, to become more indistinct as the mist rose and the air darkened.

Surely he knew that beautiful vessel, fast approaching, yet seeming to fade as she drew near.

It was the Swan!

At sight of her, a momentary renewal of strength revived the enfeebled youth. He uttered a gasping sort of cry, and made a spasmodic effort to free himself from the mandrake. Then he sunk back, the air seemed to darken before his vision—he became unconscious.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SUNKEN YACHT.

As Wilton had stated to Sinclair, he had escaped in the cutter from the rock in the sea, after Ben Bolt and his young companions had stepped out of the boat.

"Ay, ay, now!" said the old sailor to the boys, when the fugitive was hidden by the fog, "here we are, stranded, high and dry, on this blasted rock, many miles from land. The worst of it is that chap, who has escaped, do you see, will be sending his Malays after us, for I've no doubt he's in league with 'em."

Soon the fog had slightly cleared. Ben stared a few moments at the mast of the yacht, projecting out of water.

Then he leaned forward, peering into the fog beyond. Suddenly his eyes lighted.

He beheld some spare spars, which had risen from the sunken yacht, drifting near.

"Who can swim?" he inquired.

Half a dozen of the boys said they could do

"That's enough," said Ben. "Into the water ye go, and help me get yonder spars to the rock."

The lads obeyed with alacrity. All the spars were soon pushed to the rock.

There were a topmast, two jib-booms, half a dozen thick planks. There was also the main boom, which, with its sail and hamper, had been torn from the yacht by the whale. Ben thus found himself in possession of ropes enough to lash the spars and planks together, so as to form a loose raft.

The raft was completed in a couple of hours. There was enough canvas remaining to form a sail.

The sail was attached to the slender fly-jib-boom, which was then lashed firmly to the center of the raft by ropes, passed round the lower part and one of the timbers.

"If I'm not mistaken, the wind is fair for the island we left," said Bolt. "All aboard!" He stepped on the raft with his companions.

A fresh wind blowing, wafted the raft slowly on her course.

Before night the fog had cleared. There, sure enough, scarcely a mile distant, was the island.

Bolt waved his kerchief as a signal to the lads in the fort.

A flash, a puff of smoke, a loud report, betokened that the signal was seen.

Half an hour later the raft touched the beach.

A boy from the fort met the party as they landed, to learn from them what had happened.

"And what has become of Mora and Sinclair?" inquired the lad.

Bolt turned deadly pale.

"I had hoped they were with you," he said; that Sinclair, unable to find us, after the gig sunk, had returned to the island!"

"He is not here."

The old sailor's head dropped on his breast.

Sinclair, whom he had known from a child, had always been his favorite.

"I am in hopes he will turn up, before long," he said, at last. "But, if he has been picked up by the Malays, God help him."

The absence of their young captain oppressed every one of the party.

"If he does not come soon, we must go in search of him," said Bolt.

"But the yacht is lost."

"Not so. In my opinion, she will be high and dry at low tide. Perhaps she can be repaired enough to float before the tide again rises. We must go to her, if it be only to get the treasure, which went down with her. That treasure, whether Sinclair be found or not, must be taken home to his uncle, and I hope I may live to do it."

The party passed the night in the cave. At dawn, Bolt scanned the ocean, but could see nothing of Sinclair.

"Depend on it, the Malays have him in their clutches," said the old tar.

He then made preparations to visit the yacht.

Some provisions, pieces of plank, tarred canvas, with nails and a hammer, were brought from the cavern and placed in the large boat, which, having belonged to the Malays, lay alongside the beach.

Before noon the party were ready to start. There was now a fog, which had been gathering since morning, but Ben had so well taken the bearings of the rock in the sea, that he doubted not he could easily find it.

"Hark!" said one of the boys, when the boat had preceded a few miles. "I thought I heard a voice, off there in the fog."

All listened eagerly, but not hearing anything, they concluded that the lad had been mistaken.

Little did they think that, at this very moment, the cutter containing Sinclair and Wilton was passing, not two hundred yards distant.

They had some difficulty in finding the rock they were in search of, but, at last, they discovered it. The tide was now so low, that the sand-bank, on which lay the yacht, was visible, under the water. An hour later the hull of the vessel was revealed.

Ben, with his tools, got upon the sand-bank, and examined the opening the whale had made under the counter. He was puzzled to account for the peculiar, shattered state of the timbers, but concluded that the craft had struck, broadside on, against the rock, before she went down.

With some pieces of plank and tarred canvas, the old sailor covered the opening neatly and tightly.

Meanwhile some of the boys had climbed aboard and descended into the cabin, to find the treasure safe in its place.

"We are all right, now," said Bolt. "The yacht will do for the present. When the tide rises, she will float, and, after we get her to the island, we can repair her as it ought to be done."

The party waited for the rising of the tide, which took place after nightfall. The fog had cleared, and the moon shining brightly, enabled Ben to perceive that the yacht floated well.

He boarded her with the boys, and setting his staysail and jib, headed for the island. When the vessel had approached within a few miles of it, however, one of the crew pointed out the white gleam of a furled sail, inshore.

By the uncertain light, this sail, which, in reality, was only that of the cutter, looked much larger than it really was.

"The Malays are before us!" cried Ben. "The rascals have got to the island, and we are headed off."

Knowing that his crew of boys, and that the vessel, in her present condition, were not strong enough for a combat against the pirates, he concluded to stand off from the island, and keep away from its vicinity a few days, hoping that the Malays, in the meantime, might depart.

Heading to the north, he kept on until out of sight of the isle, when he backed and filled, for three days.

Then he again headed up for the island. When it was in sight, Ben scanned it eagerly with his glass, but he could discover no signs of the sail which had been previously seen.

Concluding that the Malays were gone, he kept on, and at length anchored in the little bay near the fort.

The fort was visited, and, to the surprise of all, was found unmolested.

They then entered the cavern, when the old sailor uttered a cry of joyful surprise.

Lying on a mat, he beheld Sinclair's belt, marked with his name.

The belt was not there when Bolt and the boys left the island to go to the sunken yacht.

"Found! found!" cried Ben. "I am sure, do you see, that he wore that belt when we all sailed away, aboard the yacht."

Then a vigorous search of the island for the youth was commenced.

Soon fresh tracks in the sand were discovered. Being followed up, they led the searchers to the deep grass of a lawn, stretching away toward a thicket.

They continued the trail through the trampled down grass, and at length reached the thicket.

Among the disarranged clumps of shrubbery they kept on, until, at last, they beheld a sight that thrilled them.

Ahead of them was the mandrake, which they at first took for some horribly uncouth human being, holding in its arms the drooping form of Sinclair.

With a shout, drawing their knives, the party rushed forward, to discover that the object they had taken for a human being, was a poisonous plant.

The odor from the mandrake made their heads ache; it also made them feel weak and faint.

They hastened to cut away the tough stems holding Sinclair in their hideous embrace. The eyes of the youth were closed, his face was of a livid hue, his form was limp and motionless.

Ben laid his hand over the heart, but he could feel no pulsation.

"Quick, for God's sake!" he gasped. "Let us get him away from here."

The youth was borne to the beach, and laid on the sand, where the fresh breeze could play upon his face. But he showed no sign of recovery. Water was sprinkled over his face, and some camphor-gum, which Ben had in his pocket, was applied to his nostrils.

Then there was a slight quivering of the face. A moment after, the lips twitched and the eyes opened.

"Sinclair, my young chum!" called Ben, tenderly.

The youth looked up, bewildered.

"Where am I?" he gasped. "Where is Mora?"

"Ay, where is she, my lad?" inquired Bolt, pressing the young captain's hands.

The recollection of past events rushed on the mind of the youth.

"She is gone," he said, sighing heavily. He raised himself on his elbow; then staggered to his feet; but still too weak to stand, he sat down on a rock, Ben by his side, when mutual explanations were made.

"So it was no delusion," said Sinclair. "I really did see the yacht, while the odor from the plant was poisoning me."

"Ay, the yacht and the treasure are safe," answered Ben.

Sinclair was soon able to walk. The arrival of Ben and his young shipmates had upon him a healthful influence. It roused him from that peculiar state of romantic sadness, which youths of his age are rather prone to foster than discourage, under any real or fancied disappointment in love.

He went with his friends to inspect the yacht, which, he was glad to see, was not injured as much as he had thought her to be.

"In two days I will make her as good as she ever was," said Bolt, "thanks to the timber and sails in the cave."

He kept his word. The yacht, by being lightened of her ballast was lifted high enough out of water for him to repair the damaged part.

He went to work, as soon as possible, and, in a few days, had so neatly fitted pieces of timber over the aperture that they could hardly be distinguished. When they were painted, not a crevice showed where the work was done.

"And now for a cruise against the pirates!" said Sinclair, with kindling eyes.

In the excitement of sea adventure, of the chase and the combat, he would endeavor to forget Mora.

Before setting out on his cruise, he resolved to bury the treasure. A deep pit was dug in the sand. In this the chest was lowered and covered up.

A spur near by, shaped like a cross, rising from a rugged mass of rocks, served to mark the spot.

Leaving six men in charge of the fort, Sinclair then sailed on his cruise.

On the next day he fell in with a proa, which he attacked and sunk, the crew escaping in boats. He passed on from one victory to another. His white yacht and her young crew struck terror to the dusky Malays. Many of them were killed in combat, and their vessels either sunk or burned.

Sinclair was always careful not to engage in battle with more than one proa at a time. Sometimes he was pursued by several, but such was the swiftness of his craft, that he could not be captured. When necessary, he would fall back on his fortified island rendezvous, where he could bid defiance to the whole of the small Malay fleet.

One day having attacked and sunk a proa, within a mile of three others, which were approaching, Sinclair crowded all sail to escape the superior force bearing down for him. Bolt

had run aft to slack up the main sheet, when his foot slipped, and overboard he went. Ere the yacht could be brought round, the old sailor was picked up by the crew of the boat to which the Malays of the sunken proa had resorted.

With yells of exultation the pirates with their prisoner, pulled for the approaching proas.

Meanwhile the gallant yacht, which had come round, was cleaving the waters, in pursuit.

When the boat was within half a mile of the proas, the Swan was not a ship's length from the fugitives. Perceiving that they would be overtaken, one of the Malays drew a dagger, and moved toward Bolt, who was held fast by two other men, evidently either to stab him or to cut his throat.

Pistol in hand, standing on the bow of his vessel, Sinclair saw the movement, but he dared not fire, lest his bullet should strike his old friend instead of the Malay.

A sudden thought occurred to him. He threw the greater part of the jib downhaul off the pin, and made a running noose at the end.

There was no time to lose. The man with the knife was already leaning over toward Bolt.

Sinclair making a motion to the helmsman of the yacht to luff, sprung to the rail, as the vessel was rushing past the boat. Lifting his rope, he then hurled it with such dexterity at the Malay who held the knife, that the noose caught round the islander's throat.

Tautening (tightening) as the yacht dashed on, the rope, with the noose now pressing like a vice round the Malay's neck, jerked the man like a shot from the boat into the sea.

There he was, dragged along by the swift yacht, his blackened face, protruding tongue and fixed, glaring eyeballs betokening that he was already dead!

The sight of their shipmate, drawn suddenly from the boat, and now hanging dead from the rope, alongside the yacht, had upon the other Malays the effect which Sinclair had anticipated. They all sprung up, with a simultaneous cry, gazing toward the unfortunate man.

At the same moment, Bolt, perceiving his chance, leaped into the sea.

Round came the yacht, when clutching the rope to which was attached the Malay's body, the old tar was assisted aboard by Sinclair. The dead man being cut clear, the yacht was headed away from the pursuing proas, which it soon left far astern.

The manner in which Sinclair had so summarily executed one of their number, was never forgotten by the Malays. From that time the young captain and his crew were known among them by the terrible name of "THE LITTLE THUGS OF THE SEA!"

CHAPTER XII.

LOST.

THE cutter containing Mora and Wilton, made good speed toward the merchant vessel.

The moment the young girl, who, as stated, recovered her senses soon after the boat left the island, could recall her disturbed thoughts, she begged Wilton to return.

"If we do," was the reply, "we will lose the chance of boarding the merchant vessel."

"It matters not. I would sooner return."

"Unfortunately, I would not. The Malays will doubtless come to the island. If I were there, they would tear me to pieces, after what I have done."

The girl was silent. Her gaze was fixed on the island. Tears rolled down her cheeks.

Wilton sat by her, put his arm round her, and kissed her.

"There, don't cry any more," he said.

"But what will become of him?" she inquired.

"Why do you care? One would think you were completely bound up in him—that he was the man you intended to marry."

"You know I would never marry him,"

said the girl. "He has saved my life. I am deeply grateful to him, and would not have him come to harm. Promise me that you will go with me to Australia—to where he belongs that we may tell his uncle, with whom he has informed me he resided when at home, where he is. He will get a vessel to go after him, and we can go with him and show him the way."

"Since you wish it, I will do so, although, I dare say, we will have our trouble for our pains. The Malays will probably have made way with Sinclair, before we get back to the island where he is, even if his uncle be willing to look for him."

"I am in hopes he may escape the Malays," said the young girl. "There are hiding-places on the island."

"Not long after, they were aboard the merchant vessel, which proved to be the ship Siam, bound to Australia, and thence home to New York."

Mora endeavored to induce the captain to go to the island, in one of his boats, for Sinclair. But the skipper said he could not stop. He had seen a proa, a few hours before, which he believed to be a pirate, and he could not, therefore, by stopping to pick up one man, run the risk of losing ship, cargo and crew.

The ship making good headway, before a fair wind, arrived, a week later, at Perth, Australia.

Mora and Wilton saw an old man come aboard. He was tall and lank, with a pinched face and small, sharp eyes.

"Captain, will you please tell me if you have seen anything of the ship *TEXEL*?"

"Yes, sir, she was in Calcutta. She sailed before we did."

The old man turned pale.

"Then something must have happened to her," said he, "for she has not yet arrived."

"Were you, in any way, interested?"

"I was," answered the old man. "I had a treasure, worth many thousands of dollars, aboard that craft. If it is lost, I am almost a beggar."

Mora approached the speaker.

"Your name, sir, if you please?"

"William Sandal," answered the person addressed, looking down with surprise at the questioner.

In a few words the girl then explained about the attack on the *Texel*.

"You say the treasure was aboard the sunken yacht?" said Mr. Sandal. "Have not the Malays, then, by this time, repossessed themselves of it? You also say you were brought up among these people, from whom you have escaped. You must, therefore, know something about them. Would they not have sufficient enterprise to raise the yacht and get back the treasure?"

"They might do so. But, at all events, you would stand a good chance of finding your nephew."

"True," was the reply.

Mr. Sandal spoke in an absent, indifferent manner, which convinced the young girl that the yacht's captain was right, when he once informed her that his uncle would not miss him much.

In her explanation to the old man, Mora had not stated that Wilton, her companion, had been in league with the pirates.

She had merely said that he had got adrift from a war vessel, and had been carried by the current to the Malay's island, whence, with her and Sinclair, he had escaped. Of the ring combat and some other events, she made no mention.

She and Wilton now went ashore, and hired lodgings of an honest artisan and his family.

Mora was assigned a sleeping-apartment in the upper part of the house, and to Wilton a room next to that of his host, on the first floor.

On the next day, the two were visited by the parents, sisters and friends of the boys who had gone out with Sinclair, aboard the yacht. Mora gave them all the information in

her power. One of them—an old sea-captain named Harris—said that he would get a vessel and go in search of them.

He consulted with Sandal, and the latter, who thought much more of his treasure than he did of his nephew, and who had a faint hope that the sunken casket might yet be found, agreed to help charter one of the vessels in the harbor to prosecute the search.

In a couple of weeks the vessel, a fine brig, called the "*Heron*," was ready to sail.

She was furnished with a good crew, with plenty of small-arms and ammunition, and with two guns—twelve-pounders—amidships, to larboard and starboard, that she might be prepared for any attack from the pirates.

Besides Mr. Sandal, the captain, Henry Harris, and another man, both fathers of two of the absent boys, were aboard.

Mora and Wilton, the latter to act as a pilot, were also there.

The girl, with a little sum of money she possessed, had purchased apparel enough to last her for the voyage. She stood conversing with Wilton as the vessel glided out of the harbor. There was a light flush on her cheeks, and her eyes shone brightly.

"I am afraid we are going on a wild-geese chase," said the young man.

"No, no! You must not say that!" cried the girl. "I feel sure we will find him."

A strange expression crossed the face of the young man.

"I am afraid this is a doomed craft," he said, gloomily.

"What do you mean?"

"Observe that old sailor forward, dragging the cable with his chain-hook!"

Mora trembled.

"Still I do not understand."

"Well, then, he was one of the crew of the gun-brig *Tigress*. It is six years since I deserted that craft, after running her on the rocks of the island; six years since I left her with a boat's crew, and joined the Malay pirates, but I know that old fellow's face, and I think he knows me."

"Perhaps not. You have greatly changed in appearance since then. You are much darker. Perhaps, too, you are mistaken about the man. He may not be the one you think he is."

"His name is John Rocket," said Wilton, decidedly.

"Rocket, come aft here and coil up this rope," called the captain.

"You see I was right," said the young man to Mora.

Rocket came aft. As he passed Wilton, he gave him a careless sidelong glance. Wilton looked him steadily in the face. After that the man did not appear to notice him.

"I think he knows me," repeated Wilton to Mora, "and so I am a afraid this is a doomed craft."

"Why?"

"You ought to understand. If he knows me, the man will betray me. I will be ironed, and confined to be surrendered to the American authorities. Then I will have to swing. If I leave the craft in a boat, I run the risk of being overtaken, or of perishing ere I am picked up. I do not like such risks. Better to either scuttle the brig or take her to the Malays, who would overlook my leaving them, as I did, if I brought them such a prize."

"No, no, no!" cried Mora. "I don't believe the man knows you. At any rate, you must not think of doing such a horrible thing as of sinking this vessel."

"Perhaps the fellow does not know me. He was always a little near sighted," said Wilton. "At all events, I shall watch him, sharply."

The *Heron*, favored with a fair wind, made good speed on her course.

A week after she sailed, passengers and crew were looking toward the west, ahead of the brig, in which direction Wilton had said the island should now be in sight.

There was, however, no sign of land.

"This is strange," said the young pilot.

"The land cannot be more than three leagues distant, and yet it is not visible!"

Captain Harris asked him if he did not think he had made some mistake in his reckoning.

At this Wilton smiled.

"These seas are as familiar to me as my hands," he replied.

Through a spy-glass he scanned the ocean, ahead.

He was puzzled—astonished, at seeing no vestige of land.

The captain, with his quadrant, took an observation.

Then he and Wilton went down in the cabin to look at the chart.

"You perceive there can be no mistake," said Wilton, laying his finger on a dot, which marked the position of the island they were in search of. "Here is the latitude and longitude you have just ascertained, to a certainty, we are in. You see the island should be just two leagues ahead!"

"Ay, ay, you are right," answered Harris, scratching his head. "I have sailed the sea for forty years, but I never heard of anything like this before."

They went on deck.

"Below, there!" shouted the man aloft at the mainmast head.

"Ay! ay!" responded the captain.

"I can just make out a dark speck on the water, far ahead!"

All aboard were soon, with much curiosity, watching this speck.

As the craft drew toward it, it assumed the form of a hideous looking human being standing upright on the surface of the sea!

The captain backed his main yard and lowered a boat. Mora, her curiosity excited, and a strange fear at her heart, accompanied the party in the boat.

As they drew near the object, they discovered that it was not a human being. A close inspection showed them that it was a plant, having the shape of a man, the roots adhering firmly to a hillock of earth, the top of which was not quite submerged.

IT WAS THE MANDRAKE!

The crew in the boat exchanged looks of surprise.

Wilton glanced at Mora. She was as pale as death. Her lips moved, but no sound came from them. She trembled from head to foot, and gazed at the young man with a wild, questioning look.

"The mystery is explained," said he. "The island is lost—sunken under the sea!"

The girl pressed her hand to her heart. Was Sinclair lost with the island?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ISLANDERS' FRIGHT.

GREAT was the rage of Mako, the Malay, when he discovered that Wilton, with Mora and Sinclair, had left the larger island.

He went straight to the captain.

"We have lost her," he said.

"Ay, bad business," answered the captain, "but you know it is not my fault."

"If we catch Wilton, we roast alive!" said Mako, clenching his teeth. "And we will catch. We go to look for him at once, and for Mora!"

That same day, he sailed away in one of the proas.

When the fog cleared, the sight in the offing, of a craft, which, by the aid of his glass, he perceived was a sloop-of-war, compelled him to return.

For a week the war-vessel occasionally hove in sight in the distance. At last she was no longer seen by the Malays.

Then Mako ventured forth in his proa. First he visited the rock near which, Wilton had informed him, the yacht, with the treasure aboard had sunk.

But the sunken vessel was now gone. Bolt, as stated, having, several days before, taken it away to the small island.

Mako gnashed his teeth. The scar on his face turned almost black.

"We get balked all time."

Several hours later, he fell in with the yacht, with the result which has been stated. He was defeated, his proa sunk, and he and his crew compelled to take to the boats to save themselves.

The last victory of the "Little Thugs of the Sea," and their escape from the proas in chase of them, "worked" Mako up to a pitch of frenzy.

He resolved to muster all his fleet, consisting of six proas and the schooner—the latter, by this time, having been repaired, and make an attack on the fortified island.

One clear morning the pirates sailed. They stood away for the little island. When within two leagues of it, they could see the white yacht at anchor in one of the bays.

There was the fort, also, manned, its guns bristling.

On a pole, the boys in the fortification had hoisted the stars and stripes.

"We fight hard to day," said Mako, who was aboard the schooner, looking toward the island. "We hope we kill all but Mora, Wilton, and young captain of Little Thugs. Wilton and captain we like to roast alive."

"The treasure! I hope we get the treasure," said the schooner's captain, briskly. "I think more of that than of anything else. I trust it is still aboard the yacht."

At that moment a curious noise—a hollow, roaring sound—was heard, apparently proceeding from the island.

The captain pointed at the water. Here and there little bubbles appeared and disappeared on the surface. They became more numerous every moment. A strange hissing was heard; the water foamed and seethed, as if an acid liquid had been thrown upon it. All round the island it bubbled and boiled, roaring as if agitated by a tempest.

Then the island was seen to reel and rock like a cradle. The flagstaff on the fort fell over; the tops of the hills crumbled and rolled down into the valleys below; the tall trees dropped, crashing to the earth. Mako and his men looked at each other, mute and awe-stricken.

Suddenly a noise like a tremendous explosion was heard. Every part of the island, except the mandrake, vanished beneath the ocean!

Over the sunken land the waves rolled together, clashing, roaring and foaming.

The next moment, a dark mist settled over the agitated waters, veiling them from sight.

The Malays are superstitious. In their opinion, the god of evil had dragged the island under the sea. They must leave the locality at once, or he would drag them down, too.

The vessels were veered round. Crowding all sail, the pirates made good speed, increasing the distance between them and the lost island.

They feared they would find the larger island also gone. But, in a few hours, they came in sight of it.

They told the story of the sunken isle to their friends.

For three days, the dusky inhabitants of this isle performed many curious ceremonies to appease the wrath of the evil god. They paraded the island, at night, bearing torches and howling out melancholy songs. By day they made wreaths of flowers, and set them adrift on the sea. Now and then the young women, looking far away over the waters, chanted a melancholy dirge for their queen, Mora, who, they thought, was on the island when it sunk, and had gone down with it.

When a fortnight had elapsed, the Malays, still seeing their island unharmed by the evil god, deemed the latter appeased. They recovered from their superstitious terror, and their sharp proas again clove the sea in search of prey.

One moonlight night, two of the proas were standing along toward the spot where the island had disappeared. They were within a league of it, when, suddenly, a mist which had

veiled the water there, rolled away, revealing to them a white, column-like object, which they at once knew was a sail, lying near a projecting ridge of land.

As they drew toward it, a loud, wild, simultaneous exclamation broke from their lips.

THEY RECOGNIZED THE YACHT!

Yes, there she was, her snowy hull revealed in the light of the moon, her furled sail gleaming distinct and white in the silvery radiance.

What could it mean?

They were quite sure they had seen the vessel disappear with the island.

Was it possible they had been mistaken?

There was a hasty consultation. They remembered the dark mist, which had settled over the water where the island sunk, while it was vanishing from sight.

Had this so obscured the vessel as to give her the appearance of sinking, when, in reality, she had only gone over on her beam-ends, to right, a moment after?

They concluded that such was the case, and resolved to attack the craft, which, they doubted not, they could, with their numerous crew and their two proas, easily make their prize.

At last they would destroy the Thugs of the Sea, and obtain the treasure, which they believed was still aboard the yacht.

As they continued to approach her, they heard no sound aboard the little vessel.

A deathlike, unbroken silence was there, although they could see the guns in their places, glistening in the moonlight.

All at once the craft, swinging round, they saw beyond her, an object that thrilled them with superstitious terror.

It was, apparently, the figure, hideous and half-crooked, of a man, standing there, apparently on the surface of the sea.

While they gazed toward it, with the horror excited by the vision, the moon was obscured by a cloud.

A blast of wind swept rattling and moaning among the sails and cordage of the proas.

When the moon shone forth, a moment later, as the cloud passed from it, they still beheld the hideous shape, there on the water, but the yacht had vanished!

The pirates, now thoroughly alarmed, put about and stood away from the place, convinced that the figure they had seen was that of the evil god, and that the yacht, which had vanished so strangely and suddenly, was no earthly craft.

CHAPTER XIV.

SAIL 'O!

CAPTAIN Harris having, as shown, ascertained, beyond a doubt, that the island had sunk, returned, with his party, aboard the Heron.

"If your nephew was on the island when it went down, he probably perished," said the skipper to Mr. Sandal.

"Yes," was the reply. "But my treasure! I am in hopes we will find that."

"And I am in hopes I will find my son. I intend to give these seas a thorough overhauling for him!"

The Heron was headed for the rock in the sea, near which the yacht had sunk.

As the vessel drew near the rock, Mr. Sandal with feverish eagerness, scanned the water in its vicinity. But no sign of the yacht was visible.

"There's an end of my treasure!" cried Sandal, despairingly.

"And now for the lads who went out with Sinclair," said Captain Harris. "I shall look for them among the islands hereabout. God grant that we may find them!"

"Sail 'O!" sung out the man aloft at the main.

"Whereaway?"

"About three points abaft the weather beam!"

With his glass, Harris scrutinized the stranger.

"A sloop-of-war!" he said.

Meanwhile Harris had set his crew to getting up anchor, that he might maneuver the craft. The anchor was not a-weight until the proas were within thirty fathoms of the merchant craft.

Then Harris gave the word to his gunner, who at once sighted the long fourteen-pounder amidships and to starboard.

The piece was discharged, and the jib-boom of the head proa went flying into the sea.

The three proas, swinging off, presented their broadsides to the Heron.

There were the six guns frowning upon the vessel, which, if the pieces were fired with accuracy, might be sunk by them at the first fire.

The crew exchanged glances. All stood, with their glittering eyes and compressed lips, prepared for the worst.

Mora realized the perilous situation. Her eyes flashed, her cheeks glowed with a resolute purpose.

"Crowd all sail," she said to the captain. "Perhaps I can keep these people in check!"

She got over into the starboard main chains. There, motioning the pirates back, she stood,

one hand grasping the shrouds, her lithe form turned sideways, her face to the foe!

She was right in range of the proas' guns, which could not be fired without destroying her!

There was a yell from the pirates. All recognized Mora!

Mako's eyes gleamed with wild exultation. In a voice of thunder, he ordered his gunners not to fire.

"We will board merchant craft!" he said to the English captain. "We must have Mora alive!"

Harris crowded sail. The helmsman raised his wheel.

"Steady, there!" he shouted, as the brig fell off.

The man endeavored to obey, but, caught by a current, the brig's head still swung. A moment later, there was a shock. All the sails rattled: the brig went over, sideways. She was aground, alongside the low ridge of land, which, at low water, projected above the sea from the sunken island!

"It's all up with us, now!" cried the first mate, agast.

"Ay, we must fight!" said Harris.

The proas drew every moment nearer. On the rails, the bow and in the rigging, stood the dusky crew, ready for boarding.

Pale and trembling, Mora stood watching them. She would be captured, she thought, and be made the wife of Mako. There seemed no hope for her, now.

Nearer came the proas. Side by side they advanced. As they did not draw much water, they could range alongside the brig without getting aground.

Soon they were near enough for the boarders to spring upon them on the deck of the merchant craft.

"All ready for boarders!" cried brave Captain Harris, as he placed himself at the head of his crew of thirty men.

The Malays of the three proas numbered nearly a hundred.

As their vessels, swinging half round, came alongside the brig, one of the dusky crew, a tall fellow, naked to the waist, with a low, red cap on his head, discharged his pistol amongst the brig's people.

With a groan, Mr. Sandal dropped to the deck, a bullet in his side.

"Now!" screamed Mako. "Spring, tiger men, and tear white crew to pieces!"

The Malays were on the point of obeying, when a lurid flash leaped from the mist to windward, and a shot came whizzing along, dealing death among the pirates, half a dozen of whom fell over into the water.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LOST TREASURE.

SINCLAIR and his party, on the day the island sunk, had noticed a singular milky ap-

"Under the wing" of the war-vessel he could safely prosecute his search for his son, and the other lads whom he was anxious to find.

For a whole week the search was continued. Harris, with the sloop-of-war, went from island to island.

The Malays, frightened by the larger craft, pretended to be civil and friendly.

Their proas were hidden. The two captains, although frequently among such of them as were pirates of the most desperate character, had no ground for suspicion. They pretended entire ignorance, both as regarded Wilton and the yacht. They had never seen either, they said, as they seldom went far—only going out in their fishing-boats.

Mr. Sandal, as the chances of finding his treasure thus seemed to diminish, became irritable and gloomy.

On the eighth day there was a gleam of hope. A proa was seen, chased and captured. Her appearance proved her to be a pirate. The Malay crew were made prisoners.

When questioned, they gave all the information they could about the "Little Thugs of the Sea" and their yacht.

Their account, if true, seemed to prove two things—that all the boys had perished when the island went under, and that the treasure was at that time aboard the yacht. As to the yacht's having been seen by some of the Malays, after the island sunk, Harris did not know how to account for this circumstance. He scoffed at the idea of the vessel's having been a *specter* vessel, for he was not at all superstitious.

Old Rocket was. He shook his head, saying no good would come of looking for such a craft.

The captain bowed his head on his breast. "We must try to get up that vessel. Aboard of her," he added, in a choking voice, "we may find the bones of my son, and of the other lads."

"And my treasure!" mentally exclaimed Sandal, his sorrowful face lighting up.

The sloop-of-war now stood away to the northward, her captain hoping he might in that direction find the fugitive Wilton.

Harris, taking with him an expert diver, arrived, next day, off the spot where the island had sunk. He set the diver to work, at once, looking for the sunken yacht.

The vessel could not be found. Sandal groaned and wrung his hands.

"Lost forever, my treasure!" he exclaimed.

Mora, who, with the intensest interest, had been noting the movements of the diver, now leaned over the rail and looked across the wide waters, an expression of despair on her face.

About a mile distant a mist had settled on the sea. From this mist the girl suddenly saw emerge the mast of a proa. It was followed by another. The second proa was followed by a third!

Snake-like, the three vessels glided swiftly along toward the brig.

There were the dusky pirate crews all armed to the teeth, looking over the rails: there were the two slender guns projecting out from each proa's side!

So engrossed were the crew, watching the diver who was still at work, that it was only the cry of the girl that warned them of their danger. Then, looking up they saw the proas for the first time!

Captain Harris, prompt and energetic, at once distributed arms among his crew, and ordered the sailors who were to act as gunners, to their stations.

"You do not intend fighting against such odds?" said Mr. Sandal to the captain.

"There is no help for it," was the reply. "We can but do our best. Those Malay pirates never show quarter!"

"I think you are right," answered Sandal, who was no coward.

He procured his revolver, and stood ready to assist the crew.

The Malay vessels rapidly approached. On the bow of the head one, stood hideous Mako, his naked cutlass in his hand.

Wilton, who was near him, started and looked uneasy.

"Heading this way?"

"Ay, ay."

The young man turned his head, quickly. He then encountered the gaze of old Rocket, who was aft, coiling a rope, fixed upon him in a peculiar manner.

When he saw he was observed, the old tar colored, and went on coiling the rope.

Wilton seemed on the point of speaking to Mora. He looked at her, but she did not see him. Since the discovery of the lost island, she had not said a word to him. Her face was clouded with sorrow, the bright color had passed from her cheeks; she was still, thoughtful.

A frown wrinkled Wilton's forehead. Walking to her side, he said, in a low voice:

"Will you go with me?"

She started and looked up.

"Go where?" she inquired.

"I don't know; but I must leave this craft, to-night!"

"Why?"

"A sloop-of-war approaches, and Rocket knows me. I am sure of that, now! By night we will speak that vessel. Do you understand?"

"Yes; but are you sure Rocket knows you?"

"I feel convinced of it. Will you go with me?"

"She looked at him, a moment. Then, stifling a sob, and laying one of her little hands in his, she answered:

"Yes, I will go with you!"

Night soon came. The light of the sloop-of-war was seen, not a league distant. The night was dark and cloudy.

"Now is our time," whispered Wilton to the young girl.

At that moment, Captain Harris stole on the quarter deck, armed with a pistol, and accompanied by his two mates.

He confronted Wilton.

"I am sorry to say, that I must put you under arrest," he said to the young man. "Rocket tells me that you wrecked and deserted a war-vessel, that you went over to the Malays, and that, joining them, you drove away the crew of the wrecked craft."

"The man is a liar," said Wilton, coolly.

"Perhaps so, although I think him honest. The charge is a grave one, and therefore, if for no other reason than to save the Heron from meeting the fate of the war-craft, I must, at least, put you in confinement. Will you go into the cabin?"

The young man seemed to conclude that resistance was useless.

He went into the cabin, and was locked in one of the rooms.

Mora, trembling and agitated, had witnessed what took place.

The sloop-of-war drew every moment nearer.

At length Harris spoke her, to learn that she was the Cumberland of New York, of thirteen guns.

He requested the captain to come aboard, and bring marines with him, as he had a prisoner for him.

The boat of the sloop was soon alongside.

The captain, with several armed marines, stepped aboard. Rocket was called, and explanations were made. The corporal with his marines, accompanied Harris into the cabin. The skipper unlocked the door of the apartment in which Wilton had been confined.

The room was empty!

The captain ran to the cabin window, which was open. A boat he had left, towing astern, was gone.

"Escaped!" said the captain. "I don't see how he did it, unless the key of his own room, which he had with him, fitted the lock. That must have been the case."

The sloop's captain, when told of the prisoner's escape, returned aboard. He had said he would look round awhile, among the islands thereabout, as Wilton had doubtless made for one of them.

Harris deemed this a fortunate circumstance.

pearance of the water, in the vicinity of the beach, ere the Malay proas approached to attack them.

This appearance of the water excited no alarm in the minds of the boys. All were at their stations, ready to do their duty, as the pirate fleet drew near.

Suddenly the subterranean roar was heard, seeming to come up from under their feet. When the island began to rock, Bolt shrugged his shoulders.

"Something's going to happen out of the common, my lad," he said to Sinclair.

All round the yacht, the water now commenced to bubble and boil. The Malay vessels showed signs of standing off from the island.

"There'll be no fighting, to-day," continued Bolt. "We must now think only of saving ourselves, as there's going to be an earthquake, or some such 'catastroph.'"

Sinclair summoned the boys from the fort. They all came aboard the yacht in the boat, which had been left near the beach.

"The treasure!" exclaimed Sinclair. "We must try to get that aboard!"

"I don't know who'd venture ashore, now," cried one of the boys.

"I will," said the young captain. "I think I will have time, at least, to fasten the end of a rope to one of the rings of the chest, ere the island goes."

There was a coil of rope on deck. Sinclair, seizing the end of it, sprang into the boat, and called for a pick and shovel.

Bolt handed them to him. Then he sprang into the boat.

"It shall never be said that Bolt let his young chum go alone on such a duty!" exclaimed the old tar. "If there's dying to be done, why, then, we'll die together; do you see?"

The end of the rope aboard was loosely secured to the mast. The boys on deck stood ready to haul.

One shove, with Bolt's powerful hands, sent the boat to the beach.

Sinclair and the old sailor, springing out, went to work.

In a few minutes they had unearthed the treasure. The end of the rope was fastened to the ring, at one side of the chest.

"Haul!" shouted Sinclair.

But, at that moment, the ground seemed to crumble away beneath the feet of the two on the beach.

Roaring, gurgling and hissing, the water swept over them.

Rising and clashing together in ridges, it rose around the yacht, and poured in torrents over her deck. The strain of the sinking anchor dragged her down on her beam-ends. Terrified, her crew clung to rails and rigging, to save themselves from being washed overboard.

Meanwhile, Bolt and Sinclair, feeling themselves going down, caught at the rope attached to the chest.

The water rolled over them. They struggled in the embrace of the mad waves. A mass of earth fell from the promontory near them upon their heads, nearly sweeping them from their hold on the rope.

A sort of whirlpool, formed by the sinking of the ground under their feet, drew Sinclair, who was nearest to it, down into the pit.

Bolt, seeing him going, made a plunge and caught him by the shoulder with one hand. This enabled the youth to regain his hold of the rope.

The two endeavored to draw themselves to the yacht. They had nearly reached it, when the end of the rope aboard slipped away from the mast, to which, as stated, it was only loosely attached.

Thus the old tar and his companion found themselves adrift.

Vainly they endeavored to make head against the overwhelming waters. They were almost suffocated, when, suddenly, Sinclair's hand struck against something.

It was the boat in which they had come ashore. The craft was now turned bottom up. The youth seized it, and, seeing the top of Bolt's head, above the water, he grasped the old tar by the hair, drawing him toward the vessel, which he, too, thus succeeded in grasping.

They were swept toward the yacht, which they managed to board. The vessel, still down on her beam-ends, was now half full of water.

Appalled—awe-stricken—the boys all clung to ropes and shrouds, watching the island as it crumbled to pieces and sunk.

With the water still pouring over her, it seemed as if the yacht must soon go down. A surging wall caught her, and drew her toward the sinking isle. At the same moment, with a hollow, deafening roar, the whole island vanished beneath the sea.

Caught in the white, circling eddies and whirlpools, the yacht spun round, and seemed about to sink, when, with a grating sound, her keel struck something, and she remained stationary, nearly upright.

The convulsions of the water gradually subsided. The crew looked at each other, speechless and silent. Round them was the wilderness of waters, but no sign of the island they had so lately occupied.

The surface of the sea where the isle had disappeared, soon became nearly calm. Then they realized that they owed their salvation to the yacht's having struck upon a ridge of land, which had only sunk a few feet under water.

Astern of them, they now beheld the mandrake, weirdly projecting above the sea, standing on a point which had not quite disappeared beneath the surface. The trees in the vicinity of the singular plant, had been torn up, but the tough roots of the mandrake had withstood every shock.

"Here we are safe at last my lad," said Bolt to Sinclair. "The first thing to do, now, is to pump the craft dry."

The boys went to work, and, in a few hours, they had pumped all the water out of their vessel.

"Now, then," remarked the old sailor, "I think it will be an easy thing to get the yacht clear."

The crew, having got up the anchor, lowered one of their boats, and commenced the work of towing their vessel off the ground upon which she was stranded.

This task was soon accomplished. The yacht floating clear of the land, the crew carefully inspected her, but they could not discover that she had sustained any injury.

"Now for the treasure," said Sinclair.

The vessel, headed away from the sunken ridge, was brought within ten fathoms of it, when the boys commenced their search for the treasure.

They pulled hither and thither, hoping they would see the rope attached to the chest, but they could discover no sign of it.

Toward nightfall they returned aboard the yacht.

"Don't be discouraged," said Bolt to the young captain. "We'll find it in time. Blast me, though, if I don't wish it was aboard, now. I'm afraid those Malays, do you see, will be upon us, while we are hunting for it."

As he spoke, his gaze chanced to wander to the mainmast. He then noticed that the spar was badly cracked, a few feet above the deck.

"That will never do," he said, pointing out the injury to Sinclair. "It wouldn't take much to send that mast crashing over the side."

"What shall we do? We have no more spare spars aboard," said the youth.

"We will have to go where we can get one. Teak wood grows on some of the islands hereabout."

Next day, from morn till night, the search for the treasure was continued, but still without success.

"I tell you what we want," said Bolt. "We want a good diver. You and I are as

good as most white men, but we can't compare to some of the blackshins hereabout, on some of the islands. Them fellows, I tell you, is almost 'amphibious.'"

Sinclair sat looking despairingly at the water.

"I am afraid we have lost that treasure, at last," he remarked.

Bolt, however, seemed hopeful.

"I dreamed, last night," said he, "of finding a basket full of gold-fish. What d'ye think of that, my lad? What does that mean but that we shall find the treasure? But the first thing to do is to get our new mast. Nobody will meddle with the treasure, while we are gone."

The two went down into the cabin and consulted their chart. They then discovered that there was an island about twenty leagues to the northeast, inhabited by a peaceful race of cowrie fishers.

"The ridge is again in sight," remarked Sinclair, when they returned on deck, and stood by the rail.

As he spoke he pointed to a ridge of land, about forty feet in length, and about ten feet above the water. It was the same strip of land on which the yacht had struck, and which the crew had discovered was visible at low tide.

The old sailor looked at the ridge, and from the ridge to the yacht's mainmast. Some peculiar thought, evidently, had occurred to him.

"I have been thinking," he said, at length, "that, if the Malays should come upon us while we are fishing for the treasure, they would guess what we were doing, and, having driven us away, would succeed in getting the chest, themselves."

"Ay, ay," said Sinclair. "Having lost our fort and rendezvous, we couldn't make much of a fight, now, against two or three proas."

"Right, lad. But, do you see, I have an idea. In the first place, them islanders is all superstitious. They have been frightened half out of their wits, by seeing the island vanish so suddenly. They think the yacht—all of us, in fact—have gone to Davy Jones. They will not revisit this place, for some days, you may depend on that. Well, do you see, if they should come here and get sight of the yacht, they would think she was a specter craft, or something of that sort. They'd think so, at first, but they'd be likely to soon get over it. To prevent their getting over it, I have a plan, my lad; which is to have the yacht so that, at any moment, at a reasonable distance from 'them' who see her, we can make her appear to vanish out of sight."

"How can that possibly be done?"

"It can be done, my lad, if the Malays will only happen to come in sight of us while the ridge is above water. We can have the yacht lie so that, at any moment, we can swing her around behind the ridge, and lower our mast."

"Lower our mast?"

"Ay, ay, I can arrange that. The new mast shall be so fixed that we can lower it, at any minute. The mast wants to be set in iron sockets, and have good strong ropes with pulleys attached to it above, and communicating with the deck."

Sinclair approved of this plan.

They set sail at once, heading for the island where they were to get their new mast and also an expert diver.

In due time they arrived at the island. They found some good teak wood, when Bolt at once went to work.

In about ten days the new mast was fitted on the yacht. It was arranged so that it could be lowered at any moment. With an islander for a diver, the crew then returned to the place where the island had disappeared.

All day long the diver worked, looking for the treasure. He was a tall, lithe native, who could remain under water five minutes at a time.

Toward nightfall, he made what he intended to be his last dive for the day.

The boy crew, leaning over the rail, watched anxiously for his reappearance.

When he came up, there was a shout of joy.

The islander held up the rope which Sinclair had attached to the chest.

"Found! found at last!" exclaimed the youth.

The diver was seen to shake his head. He clambered up alongside and passed the rope to Sinclair. The young captain hauling on it, drew up only the end, which had somehow, probably by chafing against a jagged rock under water, become loosened from the ring of the chest to which it had been attached.

Sinclair turned pale with disappointment.

"All right!" said Bolt. "As he has found the rope, the chest cannot be far from it. He'll find it, my lad, you may depend on that!"

The islander again dove. In three minutes, he returned to the surface.

"No can see chest," he said. "It getting too dark for work longer this day."

The man came aboard. Sinclair seemed discouraged, but Bolt was hopeful.

Soon after moonrise, a sail was sighted, approaching. It proved to be a Malay proa. As it drew nearer Ben resorted to the artifice, the result of which has been described.

By means of a rope attached to the ridge, the yacht was pulled up, so that it swung round behind the projecting strip of land. Then the mast was lowered, thus giving to the vessel the appearance of suddenly vanishing from sight.

When the frightened Malays had headed their vessel away, and she was well out of sight, the yacht's mast was again raised.

The boys were jubilant over the success of their stratagem.

"Ay, ay, now, and you may be sure there's now no danger of our being molested while we are here," said Bolt.

Next morning, the islander again went to work. At the third dive, he came up with shining eyes.

"Me found! me found!" he cried. "Me see chest, half hid by sand."

The end of the rope was passed to him. He secured it to the ring of the chest, under water.

The boys hauling on the rope, soon had the chest aboard.

"All right, now, lad!" said Bolt, joyfully to Sinclair. "Are we bound home, now?"

"It is my duty to take the treasure home to my uncle. We will cruise, a few weeks longer, against the Malays, after which the craft may be headed for home. I trust you will take her home for me Ben!"

"What? Why blast me, lad, what do you mean? You speak as if you were not going, too."

"I shall not go with you, Bolt."

The old sailor grasped the hand of his chum.

"You don't mean it, lad?"

"Yes, I mean it. I shall remain on the island where we procured our wood for the mast. There is nothing to call me home. My mother died, years ago, my uncle never liked me much. I shall not be missed."

"Something's the matter with you; tell me what it is? You have been downhearted a long time."

Sinclair was silent. He turned his face away to hide the quivering of his lips. All the efforts of Ben to ascertain the true cause of his resolve not to go home were unavailing.

An hour later the yacht was speeding along toward the island where she had last been repaired and to which the diver was to be returned.

When they arrived there, several of the boys, who had been wounded during the many combats with the Malays, were taken ill, the consequence of carelessness in the treatment of their injuries.

Sinclair remained anchored off the island for several weeks, at the end of which time the invalid boys had recovered.

The young captain then set sail, to cruise against the Malays.

When about twenty miles from the island, the lookout man saw a speck on the water.

This speck was soon ascertained to be a boat containing a single occupant. It was soon near enough for Sinclair to recognize the man in it. To his surprise this man proved to be Wilton!

The captain threw him a rope. As Wilton grasped it, his boat, which was in a shattered condition, sunk under him.

The young man clambered to the deck.

"A narrow escape," he said, looking at the half sunken boat, as he gained the deck.

"What does this mean?" inquired Sinclair.

"How came you in that boat?"

"I am glad to see you all alive," cried Wilton, looking round at the crew and laughing.

"This is not an answer to my question," said Sinclair.

The young man remained silent a moment. He was resolved to invent a story.

"The fact is," he said, at last, "after leaving Mora at Australia, I took a notion to go out as mate of a merchant brig. The other night I got into the brig's boat towing astern, to look for something I had left there, while at work in her during the daytime. Somehow the warp, which must have been carelessly secured, gave way, and I found myself adrift. I tried to make myself heard by those aboard, but could not. The brig drifted away in the fog and darkness, and there I was, in an open boat at sea."

"In a few hours my boat struck violently against that same rock in the sea near which the yacht went down. The boat's timbers were cracked, but, hoping she was not badly injured, I kept on in search of the brig. Not being able to see anything of her, I put down the oar with which I had been sculling and allowed her to drift on."

"Toward morning, she began to leak badly. But for my falling in with you, I must have been lost."

"While cruising against the Malays," said Sinclair, "we may fall in with your brig."

"I hope so," answered Wilton, while, mentally, he resolved to get away, as soon as possible, from the yacht.

That very day, however, he met with an accident that prevented his carrying out his purpose. He fell from the yacht's rigging into which he climbed, spraining his right ankle, so that he was, for a whole week, scarcely able to walk.

On the eighth day he had recovered from his injury. Sinclair, meanwhile, had been cruising about, vainly looking for a proa.

Suddenly the report of a gun was heard, proceeding from a belt of fog, ahead.

Wilton started. He fancied that gun was fired by the sloop-of-war. Sinclair headed his yacht in the direction of the sound. She had nearly passed through the belt of fog, when the crew beheld an unexpected sight.

Fast aground, on the ridge of land projecting up from the sunken isle, they beheld the brig Heron, attacked by the proas, the crews of which were on the point of boarding her. Sinclair at once ordered Bolt to sight the forward gun.

The old tar did so, and the piece was discharged, with the result already mentioned.

CHAPTER XVI

THE COMBAT.

A MOMENT after the shot was fired, the yacht emerged to view, making straight for the proas.

All aboard the brig stared as if they could not credit their senses. Captain Harris was nearly unmanned.

"The yacht!" he exclaimed. "My son is probably aboard, safe and sound!"

Mora's eyes gleamed with joy. She clapped her hands, while the color came and went on her smooth cheeks.

Meanwhile the effect of the sudden reappearance of the "Little Thugs of the Sea," whom they had supposed were lost, and the yacht, which they had previously taken for a specter craft, was such that Mako and his dusky crews

shrunk back, thus allowing their vessel to drift on and the favorable moment for boarding to pass away.

With wildly rolling eyes and frightened faces, the Malays all huddled together, losing their self-possession, while they glared at the beautiful yacht, coming bravely on, scattering the spray around her white prow.

At length the English captain made himself heard.

"Ho! there! What is the matter?" he cried. "Foolish men to be frightened at nothing. Specter vessels don't fire solid shot to kill people with. There has been a mistake. The island was lost but the 'Little Thugs' saved themselves and their vessel!"

This speech was not without its effect. Mako, the first one to be convinced, rallied his men, who soon recovered from their superstitious terror.

Again the proas swept toward the brig. The yacht came on until she was within twenty yards of the nearest proa, when she was brought up into the wind.

Her little broadside was then poured upon the pirate craft, her boy crew cheering, as the shot took effect, bringing down the mast of the vessel.

"Well done! well done!" shouted Harris, admiringly, from the brig.

On the deck of this vessel Sinclair could now see Mora.

He staggered back, and was much agitated.

Just then Bolt came to his side. "We'll have a tough time of it, lad, with them three proas, seeing as the brig being grounded, can't do any good."

"Tough let it be," answered the young commander. "We must fight those fellows while we have a plank left."

"We sink yacht first, and board brig afterwards," cried Mako, when he saw the mast of one of his proas go over.

The two other proas were then headed straight for the yacht, which it was the intention of the crews to attack simultaneously on both sides—to larboard and starboard.

Sinclair saw their intention, and resolved to thwart it. As they came on, he suddenly luffed up, presenting his broadside to both vessels. His guns roared, and the head-rails of the two proas flew in splinters, while groans and shrieks, proceeding from the crews, betokened the effect of the shot among them.

Then Mako's craft was swung round, and his two slender guns pointed at the yacht.

He had resolved to rake her before getting nearer.

Just as his gunners were about discharging the pieces, however, Sinclair, keeping off, presented his larboard side slantingly to the proa, so that the shot, instead of taking effect, as intended, glanced across the bow, merely chipping off two or three splinters from the rail.

But the other proa was now within ten yards of the yacht, the muzzles of her two guns depressed so that her shot, when fired, might knock a couple of holes in the lower part of the little craft, and sink her.

The young captain saw his peril. His resolution was taken on the instant.

He sprung to the wheel, and, watching for the moment when the Malays were preparing to fire, he suddenly raised the helm, causing the yacht to fall off.

The guns were fired from the proa, but the shot merely grazed the side of the little vessel, just above her water line.

Wilton, meanwhile, stood on deck, coolly noting the progress of the combat.

"Well done," he said to Sinclair. "But they are now coming to board you, on both sides. Once aboard your craft, they will make short work of your little crew."

The Malays, now recognizing Wilton, set up a loud yell. Mako's eyes gleamed like a tiger's; the scar on his face seemed to turn black. He shook his cutlass at the young man.

The latter looked at him with a derisive smile. Cutting the water like a knife, the two

proas were heading straight for the yacht. Sinclair fired his guns, but without much effect. The shot passed by the two vessels, which kept off a little, as the guns were fired.

"Hi! hi! yahi! yahi!" screamed the Malays, as, arms in hand, they crowded about the rails and the bows of their vessels, ready for boarding.

Right between the two vessels, there seemed no way of escape for Sinclair, except by running straight for the brig.

Alongside of this vessel was the proa, which had been dismantled, her crew about to spring aboard the merchantman.

"There's no help for it, lad," said Bolt to the young captain. "We must run for the brig."

"What! and draw the vessels all upon that craft? No! no! I cannot think of that!"

At that moment the brig's people had succeeded in bringing the gun amidships, to bear upon the proa alongside.

A lurid flame leaped from the muzzle; there was a deafening report, and the shot went crashing through the deck of the wrecked proa and down through her bottom.

The water rushed gurgling into her hold; she was sinking.

"Stand by!" shouted Harris, as, with fierce yells, the dusky islanders boarded his craft.

"Now, Rocket!"

The Malays were boarding the vessel forward. Rocket, with a few of his men, had pointed the larboard gun at the pirates. He waited until the whole party of sixty were massed on the forward deck.

"FIRE!" roared the captain.

The gun thundered, and the slugs and old iron, with which it was loaded, did fearful execution among the Malays, a dozen of whom went down, wounded and killed.

"Now is our time!" continued Harris. "Follow me, men!"

With a cheer, the little band of thirty made a dash at the pirates, who, however, having quickly recovered from their confusion caused by the discharge and terrible effect of the gun, met them firmly.

A desperate combat ensued. The merchantmen soon were obliged to retreat toward the after part of the vessel, disputing every inch of the deck, as they went.

Mora was on the quarter-deck, pale and trembling. She perceived that the boy's people would be defeated. Heedless of the storm of bullets that flew around her, she sprang upon the rail, determined to spring overboard and drown herself, the moment the Malays should come to make her their prisoner.

From the yacht, Sinclair saw the movement, and comprehended her intention.

"Ah, Bolt!" he exclaimed, "we will run for the brig. It is time, now, that we boarded to assist her crew."

The yacht's helm was raised, and away she went, shooting out from between the two proas.

Soon she was alongside the brig, when, rolling up his sail, Sinclair made his yacht fast to the craft.

"Lively, my lads!" he shouted, waving his cutlass about his head.

With the agility of a young tiger, he climbed aboard the merchant vessel, followed by his gallant crew.

Thus reinforced, the brig's people rallied, and, with redoubled fury, charged upon the pirates.

The appearance of the "Little Thugs of the Sea," who, under their gallant captain, fought with the utmost determination, had a depressing effect on the Malays. Soon they were retreating before the combined force, which continued to press them vigorously.

Mora's eyes were turned, beaming with girlish admiration, on the young captain. With his sleeves rolled up to the shoulders, disclosing his sinewy arms, his blue, woolen cap pushed back from his sun-browned face, his collar open at the throat, he was ever foremost in

the fight, cheering on his crew, while he wielded his cutlass with deadly effect.

A gigantic Malay had succeeded in hurling down one of the boys, and now, grasping him by the hair of the head, he was about plunging his dagger in the back of the lad's neck.

Harris, uttering a wild, fierce cry, fought like a madman, in his efforts to reach the boy, whom he had recognized as his own son. Ere the agonized father could get to the youth, the Malay must have done his work, but for Sinclair, who, with a tiger-like spring, reaching the spot, ran his cutlass through the body of the man.

By this time the Malays were so hotly pressed, that many of them, to escape, sprang into the sea. Soon all were driven overboard.

At the same moment, the two proas were seen, not ten yards distant, bearing straight for the brig, their decks, rails and rigging alive with the overwhelming numbers prepared to board.

"It will be all up with us when they come!" exclaimed the mate of the brig.

Harris and Sinclair gathered their little party, and stood ready to fight to the last.

The exulting yells of the Malays were heard, while they surveyed the little band, which they anticipated cutting to pieces without much trouble, as they numbered three to one of the whites.

Sinclair glanced at Mora. With clasped hands and wild eyes, she stood, watching Wilton, who had not left the yacht, and who now stood, beckoning to her to come aboard.

She advanced to the rail. She seemed undecided whether to join Wilton or to remain aboard the brig.

Suddenly she encountered Sinclair's gaze. Her color came and went; with her elbows resting on the rail, she bowed her head on her hands.

The proas came on. Already the bow of the head one was within twenty feet of the stern. The other was coming up to range alongside. Just then, Sinclair, who had been leaning against the cabin, pressed his hand to his side, and slowly sunk down upon the deck, his eyes closing.

He had concealed a wound from a cutlass, just above the hip. The flow of the blood had at last weakened him so he could no longer stand.

Mora, who had glanced up, saw the young man sink down. She saw Harris tear away the youth's shirt from over the wound; then she beheld the gash that had been made by the cutlass.

At this sight, she seemed to lose all control of herself. She rushed to the youth's side, she knelt down by him, she clasped his neck with both white arms, and pillowed his head on her lap. Womanly pity, love, tenderness and anxiety were all blended in her manner.

"Henry! Henry!" she called, in a voice of anguish. "Oh, God! he is badly hurt!" she added. "Bring me water!"

She kissed his face, his neck, his closing eyelids, her tears fell upon him like rain, her long hair swept his brow.

The touch of those silky tresses was magnetic. He half opened his eyes.

"Mora," he murmured, faintly, "I believe you love me, after all."

"Ah, yes, yes!" she cried. "I always loved you."

The flash of her dark eyes, the glow of her brunette complexion, seemed to thrill him to the soul.

"Help me up. I think I can lead my crew," he said to Ben Bolt.

But, even as he spoke, his eyes closed; he had swooned.

Mora bathed his face with water. As she did so, the yells of the pirates seemed to ring in her very ears.

"Oh, what will become of him!" she wailed, "when the pirates board! God help my Henry! God help him!"

The swarthy pirates were very near. Their ringed, glaring eyeballs and white teeth were

like those of wild beasts. The savage crew bristled with cutlasses, pikes and daggers.

At that critical moment, old Rocket sprang upon the brig's rail, his gaze fixed upon the mist, astern of the proas.

Suddenly he took off his hat, and waved it about his head.

"SAIL, 'O!" he roared, in a voice of thunder. "WE ARE SAVED!"

Sure enough, booming out of the mist came the sloop-of-war, Cumberland, her bows, her rails, her booms and rigging alive with "blue-jackets," her ports frowning with her guns.

A moment later, the two proas, like frightened birds, were speeding away to leeward.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

THE instant the sloop-of-war came in sight, Wilton, who, as stated, had remained aboard the yacht, taking no part in the combat, sprang to the side, and severed the fasts holding the yacht to the brig.

To set the mainsail was with him the work of a few minutes.

He then took his place at the helm, and away went the little vessel, speeding before the wind from the brig, with the spray flying around her bow.

Ben Bolt stared at the receding craft, as if unable to credit his senses. The boy crew aboard the brig, uttered cries of dismay.

"She is lost!" cried the old tar, in his anguish. "I might have known better than to trust that traitor aboard the craft."

"The TREASURE, too, is there," said one of the lads.

"Ah, the TREASURE and the YACHT—both slipped from us!" cried Bolt.

Meanwhile, the war-vessel had come up into the wind.

A boat was lowered and soon alongside the brig. There was a good surgeon in her.

"Fortunately for you it was," said the lieutenant in command, "that we concluded to retrace our course, after we had stood away a few leagues to the northward. We have come just in time to save you, drawn hither, when a mile from here, by the noise of combat."

Harris then informed the lieutenant that Wilton, the man he was in search of, had just made off, aboard the yacht.

"He can't escape us," was the reply.

The surgeon then proceeded to attend to the wounded.

Down in the cabin was Mora, by the side of Sinclair, who was now able to sit up. The surgeon said that his wound was not serious, that he would be able to move about, in a few days.

Mr. Sandal, who occupied a berth near which his nephew sat, was in a dying condition.

"Henry," gasped the old man, after the surgeon had administered restoratives, "I would say a few words to you."

The young man drew closer to his dying uncle, and bent over him.

"I have not been as kind to you as I should have been, after you were left in my charge by your parents. I suppose you have guessed the reason."

"I have not," frankly answered the youth. "But say nothing about it. You must not disturb yourself, sir, about such a trifle."

"I have merely to say," responded Sandal, "that there was a reason. Your father, my sister's husband, was a man I had never wanted her to marry. She rejected my counsel. This made me feel unjustly bitter against you—their child. I now realize that it was very wrong in me, but I could not help my feelings."

"Thank God," added Sandal, who had heard that the yacht had arrived alongside with the treasure aboard, but who knew nothing of her subsequent departure, "thank God! the treasure is found! That treasure can do me no good. Take it, my nephew; it is now yours. I give it to you, and—"

He said no more. His head suddenly fell

back, and, a few minutes later, he was dead. As he had expressed a wish to be buried at sea, his remains were consigned to the deep, that same day.

Soon after, the captain of the sloop-of-war sent a party of sailors aboard the brig to help take care of her, while he went in chase of the yacht.

By this time the ridge of land, on which the vessel had grounded, was nearly submerged by the rising of the tide.

Harris then lowered his boats, and soon succeeded in towing clear the brig, which, fortunately, had sustained no serious injury. All sail was set, and away went the Heron, following after the war-vessel, in chase of the yacht.

The merchant craft was a good sailer, clipper built and carrying skysails, staysails fore and aft, and studdingsails.

The sloop-of-war, only a league ahead, was gaining on the yacht, whose sail was seen, like a white column, in the distance.

Suddenly, evidently perceiving that if he continued on his present course, he must soon be overtaken, Wilton put his craft directly before the wind, thus increasing his speed.

All day the chase was in sight, both the pursuers still gaining.

Night at length closed over the sea, with a clear, full moon. A light mist ahead, however, now rendered the yacht invisible in the dim light.

"By to-morrow, noon, my lad!" said Harris to Sinclair, who was seated in a chair on the quarter-deck, "we will have your treasure, safe and sound aboard, I hope, unless that rascally Wilton should contrive, out of spite, to throw it overboard!"

"And the yacht, too," said one of Sinclair's crew, all of whom, with the exception of three, who were in the cabin, fast recovering from wounds received in the late combat, were on deck, "the yacht, too, which seems like an old friend, after what we have gone through with aboard of her, will again be in our hands."

"Ay, bless her 'old bones,'" said Bolt, who stood near, "the little darling will be with us again."

After awhile the quarter-deck was deserted by all save Sinclair.

Mora then came, and stood by him, her eyes shining, her smooth cheeks glowing.

He took her hand, and putting an arm round her waist, drew her down to his side.

"Mora," he said, parting the black hair from her brow, and kissing her full, red lips, "I have a few words to say to you; a few questions to ask."

He saw the diamond gleam of her dark eyes, a moment; then the long lashes drooped. Her bosom heaved, her whole frame trembled, he heard the beating of her heart, and saw her cheek glowing with a shy consciousness of the fact.

"Well," she said, in a low voice. "What would you ask me, Henry?"

"Simply this. You have said you loved me. Will you be my wife?"

A deathly paleness crossed her face. She gently withdrew her hand.

"No," she said, solemnly, "not I!"

Then tears rolled down her cheeks. They flowed so fast, that, as she hung her head, some of them dropped on her little feet.

Her words fell like a knife-thrust on the heart of the youth.

"Be it so," he answered, sadly. "I see I was mistaken. What you call love is merely gratitude and friendship. Your heart is another's—that other is Wilton!"

"No—no!" she exclaimed.

She took his fair head between both her hands, and pressed it to her bosom. Then she turned suddenly away.

"Ah, woe is me! woe is me!" she murmured, in a voice of anguish.

"Speak, Mora. Be frank with me! what do you mean?" He put his arm round her waist, and again drew her toward him. She struggled, but not very hard.

Then she looked up at him, and said with naïveté:

"I want you, but I cannot have you!"

"Dear girl, what mean you?"

"I will tell you," said the young woman.

"It is time I told you, now! Wilton is my own brother! The outlaw and pirate Morton, of the Malays, is my father. Years ago my father escaped from Botany Bay, where he was a convict. He joined the Malays, he married one of their women, who died a few years after. That woman was the mother of myself and Wilton Morton (this is his real name) my brother. When my brother was a boy, he ran away, and went to the United States. In his twentieth year, he became lieutenant aboard the U. S. gun-brig, Tigress. That brig he ran on the rocks, off the island which has lately sunk, and with a boat's crew, whom he had induced to join him, went to my father and his lawless band. He guided them to the wrecked brig and attacked the crew, many of whom were killed, the others escaping in boats. The guns fell into the Malays' hands. Some of these pieces they mounted aboard their vessels, the others they concealed on the island."

"A war-vessel was sent out to search for Wilton, but he succeeded in hiding himself where he could not be found. It was thought that he had died. When you saved me from the burning vessel, I refrained from making explanations to you; for, while I disapproved of my brother's and father's conduct, I could not bring myself to betray them. Subsequently when I met my brother aboard the yacht, I could with difficulty prevent myself from showing, before you, that I knew this person whom you deemed a stranger to me. In the conversation which followed between us, he acknowledged he had come to put the yacht and her crew, by strategy, in the power of the Malays. I begged him not to do so, and he promised me he would not, but, not knowing, then, that I loved you, as he told me, afterward, he had not intended to keep his word."

"On the island, to which you were taken captive, I frankly owned to him that I loved you, and at last prevailed on him to attempt your rescue. He drugged some brandy, which he gave to the ring men, who were thus soon rendered powerless, as you saw. It was very hard for me to seem so calm, cold and cruel toward you, on that island, but it was necessary for me to disguise my feelings, to pretend I did not love you, as, otherwise, you would have been speedily put to death."

"And now," added Mora, sadly, "you know all. Before you behold the daughter of a convict—a murderer—a pirate, and the sister of a man equally lawless."

The young girl was silent. Pale and trembling she sat, her head bowed, before Sinclair. The young man spoke not. Several times he essayed to do so, but a choking sensation in his throat prevented him.

"Now, you see," added Mora, "why I cannot marry you. As the daughter of a convict and pirate, I must not link myself to a man like you. Farewell, Henry Sinclair," she added, rising. "It is best we should never meet as we have, to-night, again. Mora will go away to some lonely island. There, under the broad palm trees, she will pray for you. She only asks that you will sometimes think kindly of her. Good-by—good-by!"

She turned to leave him.

"Mora!" he called.

She walked on a few steps. Then she staggered, and would have fallen had not Sinclair caught her in his arms.

"Dear girl!" he exclaimed, showering kisses upon her face. "Though your father were even worse than he is, it would not change my love for you. Again I ask you to be my wife."

Mora could not resist his urgent pleading. Soon her head drooped on her lover's shoulder, her hand glided into his, and she gave the wished-for promise.

Next morning the mist cleared. The yacht was then visible, not a league ahead, making straight for a cluster of low islands, not two miles off. Between the two nearest isles the water was white and foaming.

"There is a whirlpool, there," said Harris, who had been looking through his glass.

Bolt turned pale. A sudden suspicion had crossed his mind.

"God help the little yacht!" he exclaimed.

The sloop-of-war was a mile ahead of the Heron, booming along, under a perfect cloud of canvas.

She discharged a gun, as a signal to Wilton to heave to, but the young man kept straight on for the dangerous whirlpool.

"The yacht is a doomed craft," said Harris, "if that fellow keeps on much longer."

Pale as death, with clasped hands, stood Mora, watching the little craft.

On she went, heading straight for the dangerous white water.

Nearer to it she drew, every moment. A dark form was seen to spring upon the after-rail. It was Wilton, waving his cap defiantly to the people in chase of him. A faint hurrah was borne to their ears. Then the young man returned to the helm, and the yacht still bore straight on.

The sunlight gleamed upon her snowy sail. Her white hull contrasted with the blue waves. Never before had she seemed so beautiful to the anxious groups that watched her.

Skimming on, she at last entered the vortex of foaming waters. Down she went, a moment, on her beam-ends, then, righting, round and round she spun. And as she thus revolved, her hull was gradually ingulfed. Her tall, tapering mast and white sail, only, were now visible.

Aloft, on her mast, was seen the figure of Wilton, for an instant, his lithe form bending far out, as he again defiantly waved his cap and uttered his wild hurrah!

Suddenly the mast went over with him, both disappearing in the white, roaring waters. Every vestige of the yacht had vanished before the gaze of the watchers.

Bolt bowed his head upon his breast with a groan. Mora staggered, almost fainting, against the rail.

"Ay, the yacht is gone," said Harris, "and with it the treasure!"

The two vessels approached within a mile of the white water among the islands.

Then a boat was lowered from each craft, that of the Heron containing, besides Bolt and others of the yacht's crew, Henry Sinclair, who, in spite of his wound, could not be prevailed upon to remain aboard the brig. The boats soon were near the whirlpool. It was not a very large one, but it was violent enough to easily destroy a craft like the yacht, some of the fragments of which were now seen lying among the rifts of the low rocks, against which the vessel had been dashed to pieces.

With great care, the seamen approached the dangerous place. The Heron's boat was made fast to a rock, near the foaming vortex.

"No use of looking," said Harris; "you will never see the treasure again."

Suddenly Bolt, who had been eagerly peering at the rocks, uttered a cry of joy. He pointed out to Sinclair a rope, which had caught fast round a jagged spur.

"That is the rope that was attached to the chest!" he exclaimed. "How lucky we did not take it off. Hooray! lad, the treasure is saved!"

With great caution, several of the seamen moved out on the low line of rocks. They gained the spur to which was attached the rope. On this they pulled, to at last draw up the precious chest.

It was safely deposited in the Heron's boat, amid deafening cheers, both from the merchantmen and the sailors of the sloop-of-war.

The chest was soon aboard the brig, deposited in the cabin.

"And now for home," said Harris.

When the men from the sloop-of-war, aboard the brig, were returning to their own craft, the Heron, firing a parting salute, which was answered by one of the deep-mouthed guns of the other vessel, stood away for home.

In due time she arrived at Perth, Australia, where happy was the meeting between the lads who had belonged to the yacht, and their relatives and friends.

A few months later, they learned that the sloop-of-war's crew had arrested Miako and Morton, with many others of the Malay pirates. These were subsequently dealt with according to law.

Before this, Sinclair had made Mora his bride. Having given old Bolt and each of his boy crew a handsome present from the treasure, he sailed for New York, where he now resides, happy and prosperous, with his beautiful wife.

THE END.

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